

Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

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**PLUS****THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO**

David Fincher out-thrills and chills the original

CHARLES DICKENS

why are there so few Dickens films?

JOHN AKOMFRAH

on Black Britain and 'The Nine Muses'

KEN RUSSELL

we shall not see his like again

L'ATALANTE

Jean Vigo's poetic classic returns

THEO ANGELOPOULOS

history and the sequence shot

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**MICHAEL FASSBENDER
AND STEVE MCQUEEN
ON SEX ADDICTION AND**

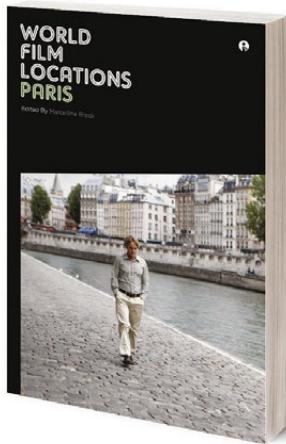
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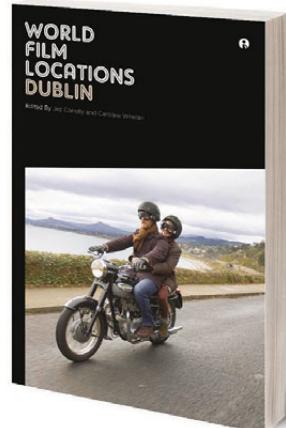
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World Film Locations: Paris presents reviews of 46 film scenes in their encounters with the imagined Paris that has for centuries haunted the collective unconscious. Along with revisiting iconic tourist sites/attractions such as the Eiffel Tower and the Moulin Rouge, spectators discover lesser known, yet intriguing quartiers usually tucked away from the tourists' gaze. This volume examines how the City of Light is reinvented through each film director's lens. Striking screengrabs illustrate the importance of location, while contemporary photographs coincide with cinematic narratives set in this magnificent city. The reader of this volume of *World Film Locations* will delight in recognizing, again and again, not only the familiar and unfamiliar aspects of Paris, but in being reassured that it is and will always be there.

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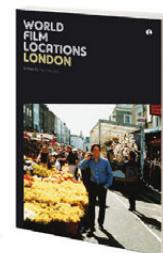
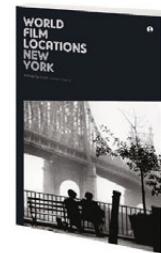
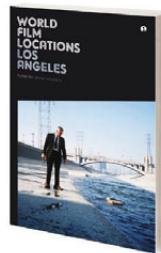
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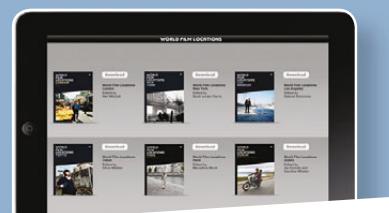
With its rich political and literary history, Dublin is a sought after destination for cinematographers who have made use of the city's urban streetscapes and surrounding coastal and country settings in many memorable films—among them *Michael Collins*, *The Commitments*, and the 2006 musical drama *Once*. *World Film Locations: Dublin* offers an engaging look at the many incarnations of the city onscreen through 46 synopses of key scenes from films—either shot or set in Dublin—accompanied by a generous selection of full-color film stills. Throughout the book, a series of essays by leading film scholars spotlight familiar actors, producers, and directors as well as some of the themes common to films shot in Dublin, including literature, politics, the city's thriving music scene, and its long history of organized crime. Also included is a look at the representations of Dublin before, during, and after the Celtic Tiger era. Sophisticated yet accessible, this volume will undoubtedly take its place on the shelves of film buffs and those interested in Irish culture.

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COVER

Michael Fassbender
Photography by Henry Leutwyler at
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Next issue
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Welcome. The start of a new year is a time for reflection – for looking, Janus-like, backward and forward, and also for looking within. This issue, we find much to celebrate from the past: from Charles Dickens's proto-cinematic thoughtworld (see p.48) to the surrealist/realist charms of Vigo's *L'Atalante* (p.40), and from the hippie hangover of Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop* (far left and p.26) to the maverick exuberance of the late Ken Russell (p.22). We speak to two filmmakers – Theo Angelopoulos (p.52) and John Akomfrah (p.44) – whose iconic interrogations of the recent past prove no obstacle to engagement with an uncertain future. And we think about how sex can be abused: as displacement activity in Steve McQueen's *Shame* (p.34), as misogynistic violation in David Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (left and p.16) or as least-worst career path in Bertrand Bonello's *House of Tolerance* (p.30). All of which is to say: happy New Year  **Nick James**

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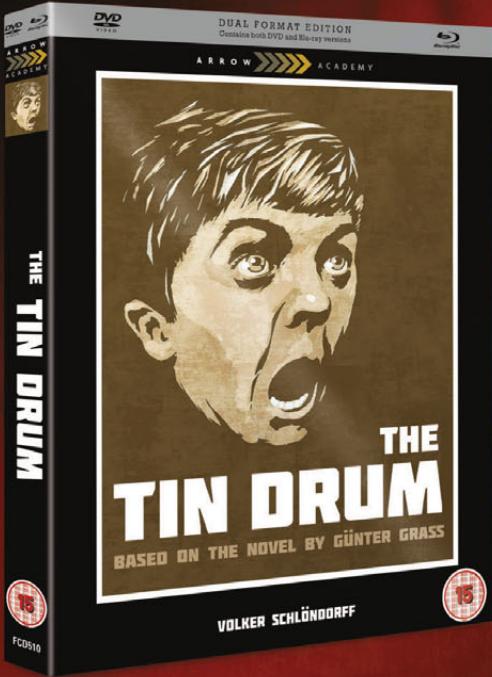
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NICK JAMES FOREGROUNDING EVERYTHING



In October 2010, at the Institut français, I was using my Blackberry to finish a text on what we in the trade would call a 'vital editorial matter' when the cinema house lights went down. As the opening credits for Raúl Ruiz's *Mysteries of Lisbon* began, a voice from two rows behind me said: "Would you please turn that thing off, Nick?" The complainant was the late Gilbert Adair (see tribute p.8) and I complied straight away, even though I was only two or three words away from finishing my screed. Not that I wouldn't have turned it off for anyone, but I did so instantly for Gilbert because he was very particular – pernickety even – about the conditions under which he watched a film. I'm glad I saw him after the screening because it meant that the last words he ever said to me were "See you," and not "Turn that thing off, Nick". Gilbert had a stroke a month or so later that severely affected his eyesight. I've had no opportunity to see him since (I was only a colleague and he was a very private man) but I was among the first to break the sad news of his death – via Twitter.

Gilbert Adair and Twitter: were he still alive he might not forgive me for putting him in the same sentence as this media platform. It was part of Gilbert's latterday persona to see himself as a man out of his time. He had a disdain for what he called, "the soundbite, the Starbucks culture" of today's "pandemic imagorrhea". Further evidence for this feeling of premature redundancy can be found in his 2009 novel *And Then There Was No One*, the last of his pastiches of classic English detective fiction, in which he cast himself as a character. At one point this 'fictional' Adair is told, "Postmodernism is dead... nobody gives two hoots about self-referentiality any longer... Your books are out of sight, out of sound, out of fashion and out of print." It might seem a self-pitying self-portrayal for a successful author but out of his time was genuinely how the real Gilbert felt. Which is perhaps why announcing his death on Twitter made me feel a little guilty.

It was while this was on my mind that I read two acute analyses of David Fincher's filmmaking style at the MUBI website that may sharpen our view of the cultural gulf that Gilbert felt. 'David Fincher and the Sad Facts', written by Daniel Kasman in October 2010, says in reaction to *The Social Network* that, "Fincher seeks mechanisms that allow him to show a series of things – usually construed as events, usually construed as specific meetings between

people. The narratives are enunciated through storytelling devices like detective work... this technique eliminates the need for fully-fledged, evolving scenes of melodrama and replaces it with a montage-based cinema of this happened and then this happened and then this."

The description seems simplistic, as Kasman himself admits, but reading the whole piece is rewarding, as is its December 2011 follow-up, Ignatiy Vishnevetsky's 'In the Process of the Investigation: David Fincher and "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo"'. Vishnevetsky's case is that "Most filmmakers... are interested in answering some variation of *why*... [Fincher] seems more interested in questions of *how* and *in what order*" (they like italics at MUBI). I'm not going to précis his demonstration here (you can find it at mubi.com) but his salient point is that *Dragon Tattoo*, probably the most 'cutting edge' example of Hollywood filmmaking around, is, "thick with" what he calls "process sequences" that chop every filmable event into smaller procedural chunks. "In lieu of the usual

.....
I was struck by how those phrases apply perfectly to Twitter. Perhaps tweets and soundbites are now matched in movies by event bites.
.....

heirarchy of major and minor action – plot and incident – Fincher foregrounds *everything*."

I was struck by how those phrases – "a series of things", "this happened and then this happened..." and "foregrounds everything" – apply perfectly to Twitter. Perhaps tweets and soundbites are now matched in movies by event bites. I tend to think of Twitter as the modern equivalent of the tickertape machine operating in gentleman's clubs in old movies. I suspect this analogy would fall on Gilbert's ears much as if I were Watson and he were Sherlock Holmes in a problem-solving trance. But "detective work" and movie style were matters dear to his heart and his ears might just have pricked up with some interest when Vishnevetsky notes that: "Though Fincher has his expressive bursts (such as *Dragon Tattoo*'s James Bond-style opening credits), his current style is mostly forensic... it turns the movie into an investigation of an investigation – a thriller about a thriller." On this evidence, postmodernism may not be dead after all, but it seems to come in bite-sized chunks of similar weight and value, with no symphonic rise and fall, little counterpoint of text and subtext, and no breathing spaces and so remains out of Gilbert's time.



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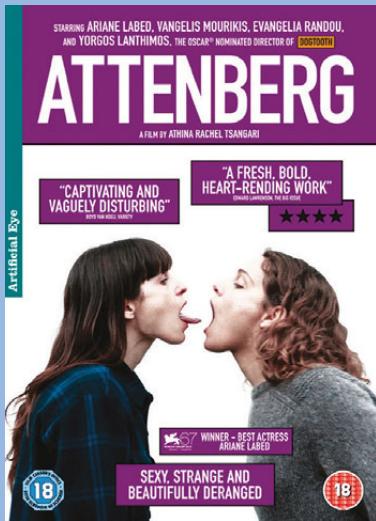
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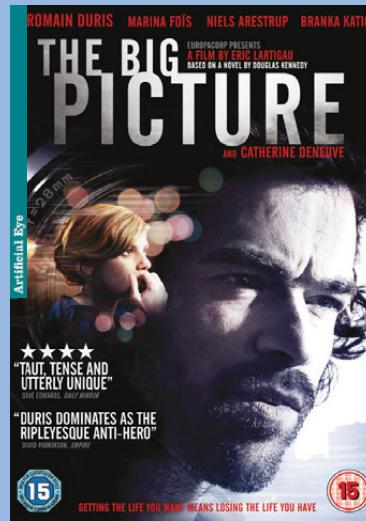
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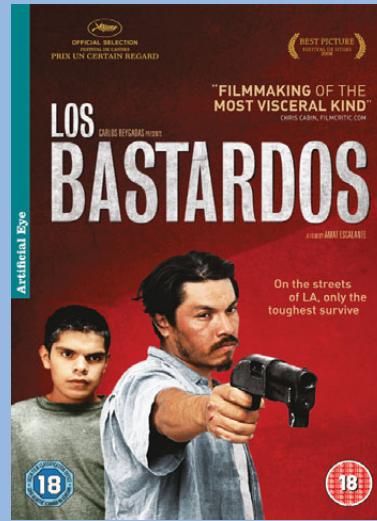
'Riveting viewing' Empire
● DVD 9 January



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The Big Picture

'Romain Duris is mesmerising'
The Daily Telegraph
● DVD and Blu-ray 9 January



Amat Escalante

Los Bastardos

'Filmmaking of the most visceral kind' Chris Cabin, Filmcritic.com
● DVD 23 January

Rushes

News, opinion, festivals and coming events

THE BIGGER PICTURE



Out of the Shadows

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's flawed but fascinating 1978 film 'Despair' provided several firsts for the German enfant terrible: it was his first English-language film, his first shot from someone else's script, and his first with a comparatively large budget. It was also something of a prestige project, upon which rested the considerable reputations of several eminences of European film and literature: the screenplay was by Tom Stoppard, adapting Vladimir Nabokov's 1934 novel; it was shot by the

great Michael Ballhaus; and it starred renowned French actress Andréa Ferréol (right) alongside Dirk Bogarde (above), in what Bogarde couldn't then have known would be the last of his exploratory collaborations with great European directors. And yet it premiered to a hostile Cannes audience in May 1978, and has provoked polarised reactions ever since. It's certainly a film ripe for reappraisal, and is back on UK screens in an impressive new HD restoration from 6 January.



“Am I disturbing you...?”

David Thompson remembers the proudly perverse critic and screenwriter, *Gilbert Adair*

My first encounter with Gilbert Adair came at a distance, at the Strasbourg Film Festival in 1981. There, I attended the world premiere of Raúl Ruiz's *The Territory*, about a disastrous jungle expedition that degenerates into cannibalism. Although, as Gilbert would later remind me, the film was then shown without credits, I somehow became aware that its screenwriter was the blond-haired, rather dapper figure who was floating through the festival, mainly in the company of the Argentinian director Hugo Santiago. And I realised that two years earlier I had watched this same person vigorously acting the part of a cult leader in Santiago's metaphysical thriller *Écoute voir*.

I quickly became entranced by Gilbert's articles in the US magazine *Film Comment* (he became their trenchant 'London correspondent' after moving here in 1980) and of course in *Sight & Sound*, where he doubled as the mysterious columnist 'Heurtebise'. But it was only in 1989 that I finally met the man himself, when I contracted him to introduce the very last season in BBC2's *Film Club* series, comprising six Rossellini films (try imagining that now). From then on, we were rarely out of touch.

Gilbert had very definite tastes and was a hard man to convince of the value of alternative points of view. But his readiness to launch into debate was second to none. I soon lost count of those regular and extended phone calls which usually began: 'Am I disturbing you...?"

As most obituary writers have noted, little is known of Gilbert's early life, his 'nitrate years', perhaps. He was willing to admit that he was Scottish by birth, educated through to his university years in Edinburgh, and had definitively separated himself from his family, including a magician brother whom he once assisted on stage. But, as an ardent cinephile, Gilbert's true life began when he moved to Paris in 1967. While making a living teaching English, he devoured movies, joining the front-row 'rats' at Henri Langlois' Cinémathèque Française. He became fluent in French and immersed himself in French culture.

The timing was perfect. His participation in the demonstrations against the ousting of Langlois and then the May 1968 riots – which he would claim made him a Maoist for a few weeks – formed the background



REX FEATURES/DO

‘Watching a film with Gilbert was risky, as he always reserved the right to walk out if displeased, and frequently did’

to his first novel, *The Holy Innocents*, published 20 years later. A bisexual riff on Cocteau's *Les enfants terribles*, it would be the source of Bertolucci's *The Dreamers*, shot in Paris over the summer of 2002. Gilbert had the extraordinary adventure of not only writing the screenplay but sitting in on the whole shoot, adapting scenes and lines (though not those musings about Clapton and Hendrix – he had no time or ear for such music) and experiencing his cinephilic, political and erotic fantasy up very close and personal.

Prior to this, Gilbert had always insisted that his book was not for the screen. However, he was more than content for his second novel, *Love and Death on Long Island*, to be made into a film in 1997 by Richard Kwieciowski, with John Hurt incarnating the donnish central character whose obsession with a young American screen actor forms an ironic parallel to the narrative of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. He was less happy with his own 2010 adaptation of his novel *A Closed Book*, which reunited him with Raúl Ruiz.

His books on cinema will forever stand out for their erudition, taste and insight. *Flickers* was a gloriously idiosyncratic centenary tribute to cinema in which he commented on one film still from each year of production. Who else would select for 1922 a film he had never even tried to see, claiming the one frame he knew to be too haunting in itself? Or choose a wonderful but very little-known William Wellman title for 1930? Then there was *Movies*, an

invigorating collection which he edited and prefaced with his own witty and touching observations. And that's not to mention his many essays and reviews. A personal favourite of mine is a *Film Comment* feature on Mae West and *Sextette*. I first read it while on the tube, and failed to restrain myself from an embarrassing level of convulsive laughter.

Gilbert could be perverse, and proud of it. About ten years ago he declared a personal veto on any new American movies, and pretty much stuck to it. He was unrepentant that he had never seen, and never wished to see, *The Godfather*. Watching a film with him was risky, as he always reserved the right to walk out if displeased, and frequently did.

Tragically, a stroke just over a year ago severely damaged his eyesight, an appalling fate for one whose father had gone blind and who had written about blindness in *A Closed Book*.

I believe his last attempt to watch a film took place in my flat: it was his 1981 film with Ruiz, *The Territory*, which had resurfaced on a Portuguese DVD after decades of absence. He had to admit that it was all much of a blur, though he saw enough to be hurt by the unexplained absence of his name among the credits. It was a strange way to come full circle.

His death (of a brain haemorrhage) comes at a time when a number of his recently penned scripts look likely to make their way to the screen. While I will dearly miss the man, I hope at least once again to see up there in large letters, 'Screenplay by Gilbert Adair'.

● **Miles Davis** is the latest legend of American music whose life is set for the screen. George Tillman Jr, director of the Biggie Smalls biopic 'Notorious', is at work on a film about the jazz trumpeter currently titled simply 'Miles Davis', which reportedly draws heavily on the book 'Dark Magus: The Jekyll and Hyde Life of Miles Davis' by Davis's eldest son Gregory. Davis's estate has reportedly allowed the use of his music for the project. The news follows earlier reports that actor Don Cheadle was developing his own Davis biopic.

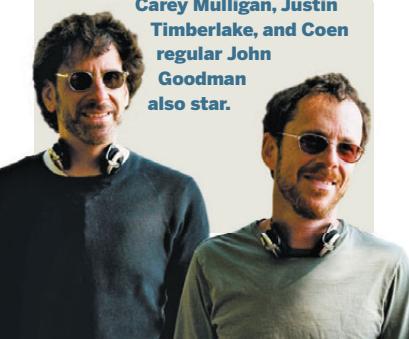
● **Fatih Akin** is following his comedy 'Soul Kitchen' with a documentary entitled 'Garbage in the Garden of Eden', about the people of the Black Sea village of Camburnu, and their decade-long fight against the Turkish government's plan to dump waste in the surrounding hills.

● **Michel Gondry** has cast Romain Duris and Audrey Tautou for 'L'écume des jours', a French-language film based on Boris Vian's celebrated 1947 novel of the same name, which translates as the suitably whimsical and Gondry-esque 'Froth on the Daydream'. Tautou plays a woman who falls ill after swallowing a flower which continues to grow in her lungs, and who thereafter needs to be surrounded by flowers to stay alive. Duris will play her husband.

● **Steve Buscemi** is to direct an adaptation of William S. Burroughs's short early novel/memoir 'Queer', written in 1953, shortly after 'Junkie', but unpublished until 1985. Oren Moverman, director of 'Rampart' and writer of 'I'm Not There', has adapted the book. Guy Pearce, Ben Foster and Kelly Macdonald star.

● **The Coen Brothers** (below), whose 'O Brother, Where Art Thou?' helped to spark a second folk revival, are now delving into the first with 'Inside Llewyn Davis', set in the early-60s Greenwich Village folk scene that harboured the likes of Maria Muldaur, Joan Baez and some chap named Bob. Oscar Isaac will play fictional young singer-songwriter Davis, rumoured to be based on Dave Van Ronk.

Carey Mulligan, Justin Timberlake, and Coen regular John Goodman also star.



Ghosts in the machine

Roger Clarke reports from a Turin marked by Berlusconi's fall and Altman's shadow

Taking place mere days after the resignation of Silvio Berlusconi, Turin – for years quite easily the most pleasurable of all the Italian festivals – seemed like the rest of Italy to be turning in on itself. But for the presence of the Altman clan, including Robert Altman's widow and son, foreign guests and journalists were thin on the ground and there was a haunted air to the staff in this most haunted of cities, famous for magic, suicides and chocolate. Opposite the Genio Hotel, where most of the guests stayed, a cinema once used by the festival had been turned, somewhat pointedly under the circumstances, into a casino. The ghost of liberal autocrat Nanni Moretti, the man who was supposed to save the festival and didn't, still seemed to cast a mortician's pall. Over the city, the spire of the Museo Nazionale del Cinema pointed like a minute hand to the silver of the Alps.

The model for the Turin Festival was a good one. The centre strand was always a retrospective, usually



Shutting up shop: industrial tensions flare in 'Sic Fiat Italia'

of an American genre director such as Richard Fleischer, and its relaxed and convivial hospitality ensured almost yearly returns from the likes of Claude Chabrol and John Landis in the years when he still jumped at every question about *The Twilight Zone*. This year, there was a good Robert Altman retrospective including early TV gems from *Bonanza* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, made when Altman was a jobbing director-for-hire. One

particular pleasure was the *Kraft Suspense Theater* piece 'Once Upon a Savage Night' (1964), a sweaty Chicago thriller where the pursuit of a busy serial killer gets mixed up with the transportation of a nuclear missile, a conflation of genre bliss. When I met Stephen Altman, he told me his father had directed his last few films after a transplant, which I knew, but what I didn't know was that he was being powered at the time by the heart of a 38-year-old woman. For a

director so particularly interested in women throughout his life, it seemed an extraordinary piece of information.

There was also a Sion Sono retrospective and the director was an entertaining figure about town, bringing a bit of quality J-horror, incest and self-harm to the proceedings. An Indonesian SWAT-team action movie directed and written by a Welshman (Gareth Huw Evans), *The Raid* is a powerful genre debut that will generate a huge amount of interest as and when it has a UK release.

The Italian section provided slim pickings barring a special mention for veteran underground filmmaker Tonino de Bernadi's *And it's So, About, More or Less*. Most poignant was *Sic Fiat Italia*, which detailed the industrial dispute at Fiat, one of the largest employers in Turin. If anything played into the mood of austerity Italy, it was this film's examination of a vote by the automotive workers to suspend most of their union rights in order to retain their jobs. It turned out to have been a waste of time: the new director of Fiat, having destroyed the unions, is now thinking of closing down the Turin factories anyway and moving the whole shop to the US.

THE NUMBERS

If it ain't broke

The start of the year remains the top slot for award-friendly fare, notes Charles Gant

It's a perennial complaint that while some months there's hardly anything to see at your local arthouse, at this time of year the awards race creates a glut of product that would challenge even the most dedicated cineaste. But if you're hoping for distributors to change tack, the box-office numbers for 2011 offer discouraging news: the current system is evidently working.

In the annual UK arthouse box-office top ten, no fewer than five of the titles were released in the first six weeks of the year: *The King's Speech*, *Black Swan*, *True Grit*, *127 Hours* and *The Fighter*. The gamble of releasing in such a highly competitive awards corridor paid off: these five films garnered 45 Bafta and 40 Oscar nominations between them, which converted to nine BAFTA and seven Oscar wins. While the awards were

clearly crucial to *The King's Speech*'s \$386m global cinema gross, it's also hard to imagine the likes of *Black Swan* (\$328m worldwide) performing so well with an alternative release-date strategy.

As far as the UK box-office is concerned, 2011 will go down as a golden year for British films. The year's top three titles – *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part Two*, *The King's Speech* and *The Inbetweeners Movie* – were all British, convincingly beating the latest instalments of the *Twilight*, *Transformers*, *Hangover* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchises. *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (£14.06m) performed way beyond expectations, and significantly ahead of 2010's top prestige titles *Shutter Island* (£10.80m) and *The Social Network* (£10.65m). *The Guard* did well thanks to gangbusters business in Ireland (£3.83m of its total £4.61m UK and Ireland gross). And *Senna*, with £3.17m, is the biggest ever documentary at the UK box-office,

Foreign language films at UK/Ireland box-office, 2011

Film	Gross
The Skin I Live In	£1,506,086
Potiche	£835,361
Of Gods and Men	*£687,109
Pina	£666,263
Cave of Forgotten Dreams	£616,533
Biutiful	£581,939
Little White Lies	£570,452
Troll Hunter	£521,345
Sarah's Key	£4513,751
Norwegian Wood	£380,826

Grosses to Dec 11 2011; chart excludes Bollywood films;
*released December 2010

excluding concert movies.

In foreign-language cinema, however, the news has been less encouraging. Excluding Bollywood, only one foreign-language title released in 2011 exceeded £1m in the UK: Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*. This compares with three in 2010 (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, *A Prophet*) and four in 2009 (*Coco Before Chanel*, *Che: Part One*, *Broken Embraces*, *Let the*

E-L prestige films at UK/Ireland box-office, 2011

Film	Gross
The King's Speech	£45,685,325
Black Swan	£16,194,653
Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy	£14,059,471*
True Grit	£8,463,591
127 Hours	£7,781,566
The Fighter	£6,329,301
Jane Eyre	£5,076,087
The Guard	£4,614,654
The Help	£4,068,264*
Senna	£3,173,400

Grosses to Dec 11 2011;
*still on release

Right One In). Even Bollywood's biggest hit in 2011 (*Ra.One*, with £1.48m) is behind 2010's winner (*My Name is Khan*, £2.55m).

Documentaries proved relatively buoyant, with *TT3D: Closer to the Edge* (£1.25m) joining *Senna* in the winner's enclosure. German auteurs Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog also delivered hit 3D docs, with *Pina* and *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* both clearing £600,000.

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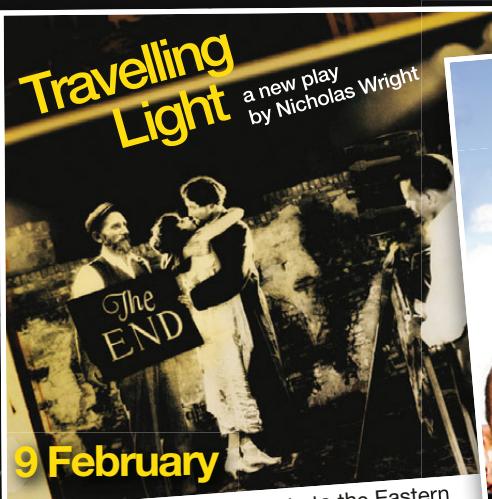
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AVIVA

The man in the mirror

Tony Rayns welcomes the revival of a forgotten Belgian classic from the 1960s: André Delvaux's *'The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short'*

Govert Miereveld (Senne Rouffaer), a middle-aged lawyer, married with two kids, is already late for the graduation ceremony at the high school for girls where he teaches. But he impulsively gets off the tram to visit his barber for a haircut he doesn't really need. He takes the full treatment: steam-cleaning, targeted blow-drying, even a vibro-massage. When it's finished, cued by the cadaverous barber, he says he feels wonderful. But his mind is elsewhere, lost in his masochistic obsession with the graduating pupil Fran Veenman, and the haircut mysteriously resonates with his glimpse of a bowl of rotting fruit as he left home. Govert, in fact, is a man heading for a major crack-up. Soon after the ceremony – at which he once again fails to confess his love to the oblivious Ms Veenman – he quits his job as a humble post as a clerk of court. And then his involuntary attendance at an autopsy pushes him right over the edge...

In the 'different country' that was the 1960s, André Delvaux's debut feature *'The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short'* (*De Man die zijn Haar Kort Liet Knippen*) was an art-cinema landmark. Its appearance in the 1966 London Film Festival won it that year's Sutherland Trophy (for "the most original and imaginative film premiered at the National Film Theatre during the year") and it went on to have a modestly successful run at the Paris Pullman, a legendarily uncomfortable arthouse in Kensington, before touring the BFI's new regional film theatres and the network of film societies. It had already picked up prizes in three European festivals focused on 'new cinema' (Hyères, Pesaro, Mannheim), and went on to earn fifth place in *Cahiers du cinéma*'s Ten Best list for 1966 after a long run in Paris. But the film vanished from distribution – and from most accounts of modern cinema – until its recent revival on DVD with multi-lingual subtitle options in the Belgian Cinémathèque's excellent series *The Chronicle of Flemish Film*.

Delvaux (1926-2002) went on to other successes, some in Flemish, some in French, one – a documentary feature about Woody Allen – in English, but never quite matched the impact of his first feature. *The Man*



All in the mind: Senne Rouffaer in *'The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short'*

'Who Had His Hair Cut Short' was based on an 'unfilmable' stream-of-consciousness novel by the Flemish writer and film critic Johan Daisne. Delvaux came to it from a very productive career in arts documentaries for television: a 'behind the scenes' film on Jacques Demy's *'Les Demoiselles de Rochefort'* brought him into contact with the French film industry luminaries (cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet, sound mixer Antoine Bonfanti, editor Suzanne Baron) who came to Belgium to work on *'The Man Who...'* and a series on Polish cinema led him to cast Beata Tyszkiewicz (at the time, wife of Andrzej Wajda) as Fran, despite the need to dub her speaking and singing voices into Flemish. But Delvaux found his other key collaborator closer to home. The film's ineffably haunting score is by the Belgian composer Frédéric Devreese, who rooted it in his and Delvaux's shared love of *'The Threepenny Opera'* and the other Weill-Brecht Weimar musicals.

What the papers said

"Some seemed to think that it might be as profound as it comes on... This reviewer agreed with the majority, who seemed to think it was a pretentious bore. The only things of interest were Miss Tyszkiewicz, who is a tasty dish, and two sequences: a chilling autopsy and the haircut of the title (which didn't seem to have much to do with the rest of the picture)."

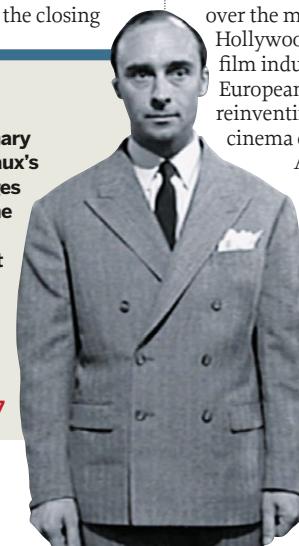
'Variety', 28 September 1966

There are echoes of Delvaux's strategy in a recent movie like 'Inception'

It's easy to agree with the late Tom Milne that "admirers of Bosch, Breughel, Ghelderode and the Flemish genius for finding horror and beauty hand-in-hand" will find the film magical from start to finish (as he wrote in the BFI's *Monthly Film Bulletin*, the ancestor of *S&S*'s review pages). But it's harder to pinpoint what exactly makes the film still so potent. There's no doubt that it's partly a brilliant directorial sleight-of-hand. Delvaux anchors the entire film in Govert's increasingly disordered consciousness, so that the viewer is inexorably drawn into the character's hopes and fears, joys and humiliations – but reveals that he's been doing so only in the closing

"The most extraordinary achievement of Delvaux's film is that he manages to suggest visually the metaphysical overtones spelled out in the novel. He does it mainly by being extremely simple and selective."

Richard Roud, 'Sight & Sound', Spring 1967



scenes. Most of the film plays like a realist drama, albeit one with some disquieting turns and unusual emphases. The closing scenes knit everything together, showing how the very elements which kept us intrigued and sometimes faintly baffled are all intimately connected in Govert's mind. We finally understand – and it's an emotional realisation more than an intellectual one – that it all makes sense to the paranoid Govert. The satisfaction of narrative closure is one and the same thing as empathy with the workings of a delusional, schizophrenic mind.

There are obvious echoes of Delvaux's strategy in a recent movie like *Inception*, but Christopher Nolan's attempt to give a CGI blockbuster a measure of conceptual complexity is all smoke and mirrors alongside the simplicity and directness of *'The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short'*. Delvaux had a big advantage: he was working at a time when the battle for grown-up filmmaking was active and vital. He made this debut feature only a few years after the premieres of *Last Year in Marienbad* and the early films by Godard, Truffaut and Rivette, and even sooner after 'controversial' masterpieces from Bergman (*The Silence*), Fellini (*8½*) and Antonioni (*L'eclisse*). He had to make the film very cheaply (funding came from the Ministry of Culture, with a boost from Belgian television) and was rewarded with a tirade of abuse from Belgian critics, most of them deriding the very idea that a film might have sophisticated ambitions. It took success abroad to change perceptions of the film at home: it was finally released theatrically in Belgium in March 1967, more than a year after its first showing on television.

The DVD edition sketches this history and has some very useful extras, but it can't recapture the cultural climate in which the film first appeared. In the mid-1960s, while critical wars were being fought over the merits of some 'authors' in Hollywood and other commercial film industries, a generation of European directors was busy reinventing what narrative cinema could be.

André Delvaux was briefly up there with the best of them, and his provocative, infinitely poignant film brings back the excitement of that moment. In short, reader, it stands up well and shouldn't be forgotten again.

Love cinematically

Federico Veiroj's affectionate portrait of a Uruguayan movie obsessive makes Edward Lawrenson chuckle

A Useful Life (*La vida útil*) is one of the droll delights of the past year. Federico Veiroj's second feature is set in a fictionalised version of the Uruguayan cinematheque in Montevideo, where Veiroj himself worked for several years. Revolving around programmer Jorge (played with lugubrious charm and deadpan finesse by real-life critic Jorge Jellinek), the film charts his daily routine in the struggling cinema, notably through his relationship with theatre boss Martínez (Manuel Martínez Carrill, another real-life cineaste, critic and programmer). Printed in rich black and white and featuring a music score that evokes silent cinema at its swooniest, the movie is a deeply affectionate portrait of obsessives like Jorge who have fallen under the spell of film. But as the cinema faces closure, Jorge ventures outside the enchanted comfort of the cinematheque to pursue a shy crush he has on a regular audience member.

Combining exquisite film in-jokes with a genuinely beguiling tale of Jorge's tentative love life, *A Useful Life* is that rare thing: a romantic comedy geared towards *Sight & Sound* readers.

Edward Lawrenson: You worked at the real-life Cinemateca Uruguaya for some years. How directly did that experience feed into the film?

Federico Veiroj: I'd been living in Spain for some years and was working in a film archive there. I learned what it was like to work in a first-world archive, in a place where they treat films properly. And it was then I first started to write the film. Naturally my experience at the Uruguayan cinematheque inspired me. I started to write about a young Uruguayan guy working in a Spanish archive, then going back home to visit his family and his friends at the film archive. The idea was to explore different views of workings at these two places.

At some point



Sex, lies & Montevideo: 'A Useful Life'; below, Federico Veiroj, left, and Jorge Jellinek

I decided to work on another film, so I put that idea to one side. Then I met Jorge Jellinek, and decided I wanted to use him as the main character. I took the original idea and adapted it.

The focus changed from a young guy to a mature guy, and I decided to restrict the film to Montevideo. At the time I was on the board of the cinematheque, so the inspiration is kind of mixed between some personal experiences and the things I'm really interested in.

When we first shot the first half of the film – we shot in two stages, with a six-month break – the script portrayed Jorge's family life and his activities outside the cinematheque. But in those first ten days of shooting, we just shot the parts relating to the cinematheque. I did an edit with the material – the first 35 minutes or so of the film – and I really liked it. It had a kind of unity in itself and I started

thinking that I didn't need to show his life beyond the cinematheque in order to understand the depth of his character. So, with my co-writers [Inés Bortagaray, Gonzalo Delgado and Arauco Hernández Holz] we said, "What if we don't shoot what we've written, and we start writing what's going to happen to this character after the cinematheque closes?" I liked also the idea that his story after he leaves his job is the kind that could only happen on screen.

EL: There's an ambivalence about Jorge's cinephilia: it's a sustaining thing, but he's also ill-equipped to deal with real life. Is that a common trait in film fans?

FV: Maybe, yeah. I know people like that, who just travel and watch films and don't have any kind of personal life – they're not able to have children. Jorge's very comfortable living in a fantasy world. It's tricky. Filmmakers could have that problem – but you also need that kind of separation with the real world to make things. With Jorge, we didn't want to make fun of him as a film geek. I like the transformation he undergoes – the way he almost turns himself into a character of his own movie. He's kind of a Don Quixote figure: he stops reading the novels and starts fighting.

EL: There's a scene when Martínez delivers a very dry and complicated talk about film education for a radio show. It's an almost wilfully anti-cinematic set-up, and yet it's very funny.

FV: I love that scene. Every time I'm watching it with the audience, there's a reaction. It's

a mix of improvisation and guidance I gave to Martínez. He talks a lot, and I love his voice; his way of talking is like a tree, like opening branches. I knew he'd act like that in the sequence. So we decided we were going to talk about the education of the audience, which is in a way a very boring thing to talk about in a film, especially as it's just a fixed shot of the speaker in a radio studio. We did it three times, and I knew he'd branch off in his talk. And you see that Jorge is also a little bored with him, and trying to get him to finish, but he's also trying to be respectful. Martínez is going to a very weird place with his talk – it's kind of crazy and turned the sequence into something absurd.

EL: I wonder if that improvisatory spirit extended to other sequences. There's a moment when the shadow of a plane passes through the window of the men's toilet, when Jorge is there. Was that good luck?

FV: The plane you see is a car. We planned for that. It's a low window that looks right on to a pavement, so that moment is when a car passes. But I like that idea that Jorge has been working there for 20 or so years and he only now starts looking out the window. We put the sound of a plane afterwards. It's a subtle suggestion that something bad is going to happen, and he knows it.

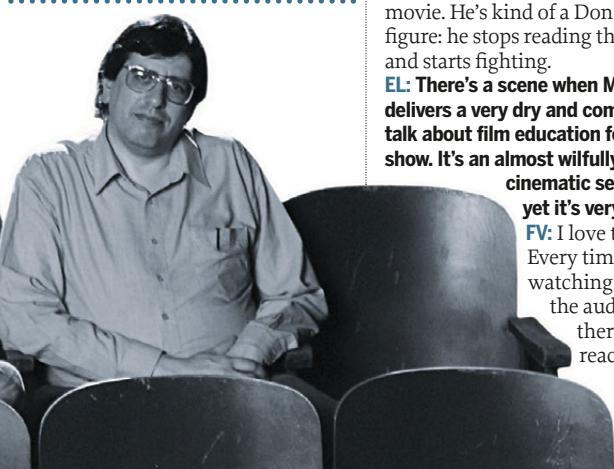
EL: What happened to the real Montevideo cinematheque?

FV: It still exists. I stopped working there a few years ago, because I disagreed with the other board members. I wanted to make it more modern, to bring new audiences, and my colleagues – not Martínez – just wanted to continue the way they were working with many problems. The cinematheque in Uruguay is one of the most famous in South America, but there aren't even Moviolas to view the prints, or a proper cataloguing system. But I very much wanted to film there. For me it's almost a mythical institution – and for many other people. It's like making a film at the NFT: you want to explore the corridors, the café, the atmosphere. You are going to understand it's a *film* place. It's a very personal place, but I think film fans can relate to it.

EL: So your next film should be about the BFI Southbank?

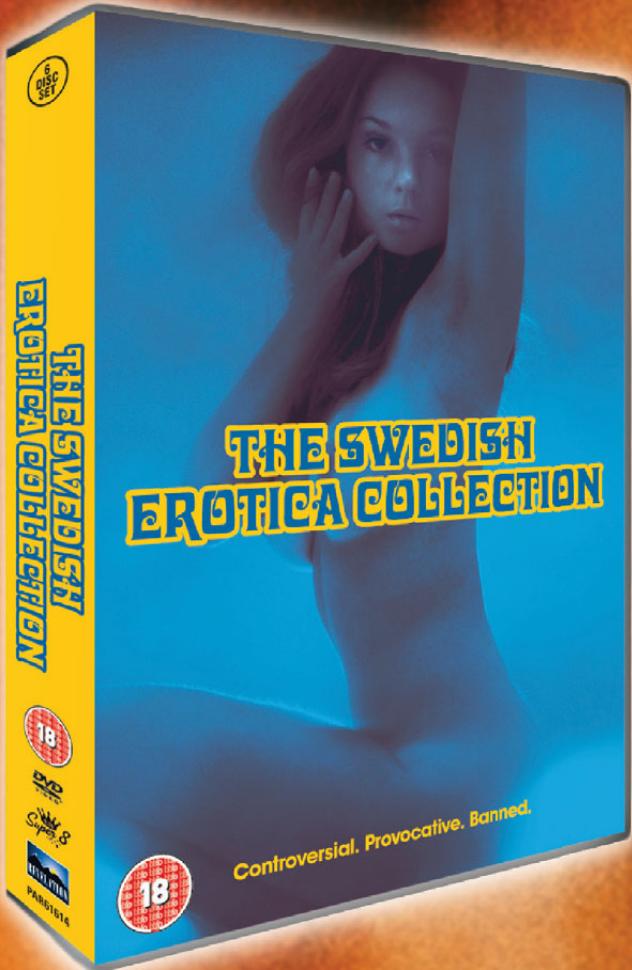
FV: I accept the invitation, sir! I lived in London for a few months when I was 18 and the NFT was part of my decision to make movies. I go to cinematheques instead of museums when I visit new cities.

'When I visit new cities I go to cinematheques, not museums'



■ 'A Useful Life' is released on 13 January, and is reviewed on page 80

Sweden's most infamous and banned films of the 1970s



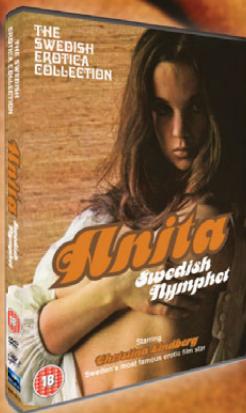
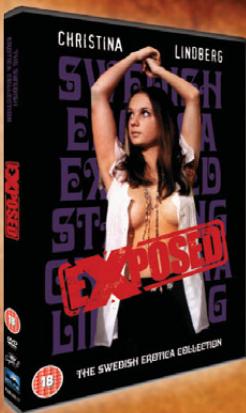
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Festival or famine

From the day this issue hits the streets (3 January), you have 145 days left before man's time on Earth comes to an end on 27 May. (You can download a free book explaining the timetable from www.the-end.com. Good to know that the end-of-days mob are keeping up with modern technology.) For those of us in the film industry, it may be especially comforting to realise that one of the last things we will learn before the Seventh Trumpet sounds will be who won the Palme d'Or, which is awarded on 27 May. Not even fire, brimstone and – if the powers of the Apocalypse are as up-to-date as they seem to be – death-eaters will get in the way of the Cannes red carpet.

I can't help remarking on the irony of the world ending with a film festival, given that everyone has been telling us for the past couple of years that film festivals are the industry's last best hope for enabling us to get at the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of films that lie beneath the distribution waterline of the world's cinematic iceberg. For this to be true – for film festivals to be anything more than elegantly constructed events at which an international elite of journalists can stock up on the best of world cinema – two things would need to be true: first, that festivals really do have a significant role to play in the film-distribution process; and second, that they are themselves financially viable, not sustained only by a black economy of unpaid workers.

The distribution argument goes something like this: with the chances of a theatrical release ever more remote for many films, major festivals offer an alternative distribution platform at which such films can be seen and talked about by critics and journalists. This will in turn create a demand for them (the films, not the journalists) on some yet-to-be-invented second platform that will make them available to those who want them, without anyone having to take the financial risk of a theatrical release. Medium-to-small film festivals, meanwhile, will themselves become an international network of exhibition outlets that will give cinephiles the chance to see new and interesting films in concentrated bursts, much as music fans now attend live performances instead of buying CDs. Or something like that – I never did quite get my head round the 'Nurturing Film Culture' bit of Creative England's February 2011 Consultation Document.

But the idea that major festivals



For all their champagne-soaked parties, festivals rely on unpaid volunteers to a degree that makes an internship in other industries seem Midas-like in generosity

can be distribution systems is itself a tautology. Distribution means sending stuff outwards from a central hub; major festivals suck films into their own hub at no cost to themselves (it's only smaller festivals where sales agents can get away with charging screening fees) – and don't much care what happens afterwards.

The assumption that the prestige and publicity generated by a festival screening will itself lead to distribution is still pie in the sky, since it puts its faith in a network which isn't there. That network may yet come into existence over the next couple of years, if the view-on-demand business in this country gets the expected boost from the UK launch of the internet subscription service Netflix. Equally possibly, it may not, because VOD catalogues are at present made up mainly of recent blockbusters, old movies, TV shows and music-related material – and are very thin indeed when it comes to art films, let alone ones without a theatrical deal. Either way, the point is this: films are launching at festivals with hopes of accessing a distribution network that doesn't exist. To say they have no other option doesn't change the fact they don't currently have this option either.

The idea that smaller film festivals spread around the world are themselves a distribution network is equally problematic. Such festivals have proliferated, with London alone boasting one or more a week. This would seem to suggest that a demand is being met – which is true in the sense that such festivals are generally well attended. But it's not true in the sense that they are commercially sustainable or properly integrated

into our cultural landscape. They are, in fact, struggling to survive.

Bird's Eye View, for instance, which celebrates women filmmakers, has cancelled its 2012 edition because of funding cuts. "Over the past few years," its website states, "the UK Film Council supported the BEV Film Festival through their Film Festivals Fund and Diversity Grant in Aid. Since the closure of the Film Council, funds have transferred to the BFI. As yet, there is no provision for either Festivals or Diversity, leaving BEV with a 90 per cent drop in public funds." The BFI might dispute this claim. But at the same time, the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival last year saw its run cut from two weeks to one as a result of funding cuts, and in 2012 will be running for eight days.

For all their surface glitz and champagne-soaked parties, film festivals rely on an army of overworked, unpaid volunteers to a degree that makes an internship in other industries seem Midas-like in its generosity. Indeed, at most festivals those who run the event are as likely to be unpaid as those who help out on the night. Maybe this would be OK if film festivals were indeed local organisations like your old-fashioned film societies, run and attended by enthusiasts in ad-hoc venues. But with all the fancy rhetoric floating around in film-industry circles about the 'role of film festivals', it's time we faced a few home truths about the way things really are. And they're not good.

– Nick Roddick

● **Barbara Hammer: The Fearless Frame** is a month-long celebration of the work of the American experimental filmmaker and pioneer of queer cinema. The season will include Hammer's rarely seen early super-8 work, as well as the premiere of her new film, 'Maya Deren's Sink'. Tate Modern, London, 3–26 February.

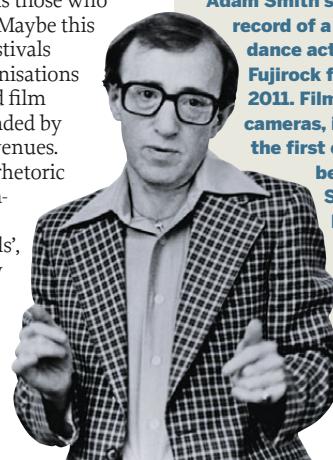
● **Faust**, F.W. Murnau's 1926 silent version of the classic tale, is screening accompanied by the Philharmonia Orchestra and Venezuelan-American pianist Gabriela Montero, performing the world premiere of a new score by the Greek-born British composer Aphrodite Raikopoulou, conducted by Benjamin Wallfisch. And introducing the film on the night? None other than that scourge of the tabloid press, Hugh Grant. Royal Festival Hall, London, 27 February.

● **Charley Chase**, who specialised in the comedy of embarrassment, was one of the pre-eminent silent-cinema comedians, up there with Chaplin, Lloyd and Keaton. His films are mostly neglected today and rarely screened. But he is back on the big screen this month with showings of his mid-1920s films 'Crazy Like a Fox', 'His Wooden Wedding' and 'Mighty Like a Moose', all made with producer Hal Roach. Barbican, London, 22 January.

● **LoCo, The London Comedy Film Festival**, includes a full cast, onstage read-through of 'The Day Off', a 'lost' script originally written for Tony Hancock by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, but never filmed. BFI Southbank, London, 26–29 January.

● **Woody Allen** (below) gets the retrospective treatment at BFI Southbank this month, with a selection of films from across his career, and extended releases of 'Hannah and Her Sisters' and 'Zelig'. BFI Southbank, London, until 31 January.

● **The Chemical Brothers** are captured in concert in director Adam Smith's 'Don't Think', a record of a show the British dance act put on at Japan's Fujirock festival in July 2011. Filmed using 20 cameras, it is reportedly the first concert film to be shot in Dolby 7.1 Surround Sound. It previews in 20 cinemas worldwide on 26 January, opening more widely on 3 February.



David Fincher has thriller form with 'Se7en' and 'Zodiac', but does his version of 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo' represent a subtle softening of the Swedish original, asks **Kim Newman** – not least its treatment of its iconic heroine?

THE ICEGIRL COMETH

The most significant female thriller protagonist since Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs* (book 1988, film 1991) and the coolest European action heroine since Anne Parillaud in *Nikita* (1990), Lisbeth Salander first appeared in Stieg Larsson's *Män som hatar kvinnor* – a book whose English-language rebranding as *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* reflects her subsequent emergence as its USP. Two more books featuring Salander completed Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy, which became the basis of three hit Swedish-language films. And now she has yet another incarnation, in David Fincher's US remake.

The distributors of Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* opened the movie on 26 December. You could argue that the Christmas release date is because it features a heroine who is basically an elf. But instead it's an instance of holiday counter-programming – an attempt to sell the film as "the feel-bad movie of Christmas", stressing a snow-bound lack of jollity and goodwill to all men. The prologue of Larsson's book, used as a fade-in by both films, shows an old man unwrapping an anonymously sent present (for his birthday, not Christmas), which he sees as a mocking torment rather than a reassuring pleasantry. Holiday chill continues as investigative-journalist hero Mikael Blomkvist (Daniel Craig, who has a distinctive way of hanging his glasses off one ear as he looks at a clue) ducks out of a lively Christmas gathering shadowed by relatively normal troubles. He is



uncomfortable with his semi-estranged teenage daughter's Christianity (though it later means she understands a Bible-based clue that has puzzled secular investigators for decades), and also facing a jail term for a libel he has been tricked into committing by a financier out to discredit legitimate criticism.

Blomkvist travels to the frozen north of an already cold Sweden to answer a summons from industrialist Henrik Vanger (Christopher Plummer), patriarch of a family with more gothic and extreme secrets, yoking together a Nazi past and a propensity for incest, murder, alcoholism, business corruption and simple rudeness. The Vanger clan mostly live on the same island, in separate houses – none of them decorated for the holidays – generally refusing to speak to each other, unrepentant about past sins and resentful even of invited intruders.

In and out of this mystery story, the film follows the initially disconnected title character. Tattooed, pierced, hoodie-wearing, bisexual, tiny, dark, rebarbative, abused, determined, sly, vengeful, Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara) is a genius-level computer hacker (her online name is "Wasp") – and also a ward of the state legally ruled unfit to handle her own finances. Lisbeth has done the background check on Blomkvist for Vanger and now has to get round a petty official with rape on his mind in order to join Blomkvist's greater investigation into crimes past and present.

If *film noir* grades despair by how dark it gets, the Nordic strain of the form stresses the cold. Reading

Barry Forshaw's *Death in a Cold Climate: A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, I noticed from thumbnail summaries of dozens of crime novels from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland how many use as a narrative hook a body found frozen in ice and snow or revealed by a temporary thaw. Another of the Fincher film's taglines is: "What is hidden in snow, comes forth in the thaw."

The victim – one of many – who draws attention to a web of hateful crimes in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is frozen in time rather than a glacier. Blonde teenager Harriet Vanger (Moa Garpendal), a glowing epitome of Swedish nymphet innocence (dismissed by her antithesis Lisbeth as "Harriet Fucking Vanger"), disappeared from the island owned by her extended family in 1966, leaving ghosts in the form of many photographs, documents and memories pored over throughout the film. Before 1966, Harriet presented Henrik with framed, pressed flowers every birthday. Since the disappearance, he has annually received similar gifts from the unknown person he takes to be her mocking murderer. Under the thin cover story of writing a history of the family – which is what he eventually does, albeit with the emphasis on secret history – Blomkvist is hired to rake over the old case, in the hope of finally solving the puzzle.

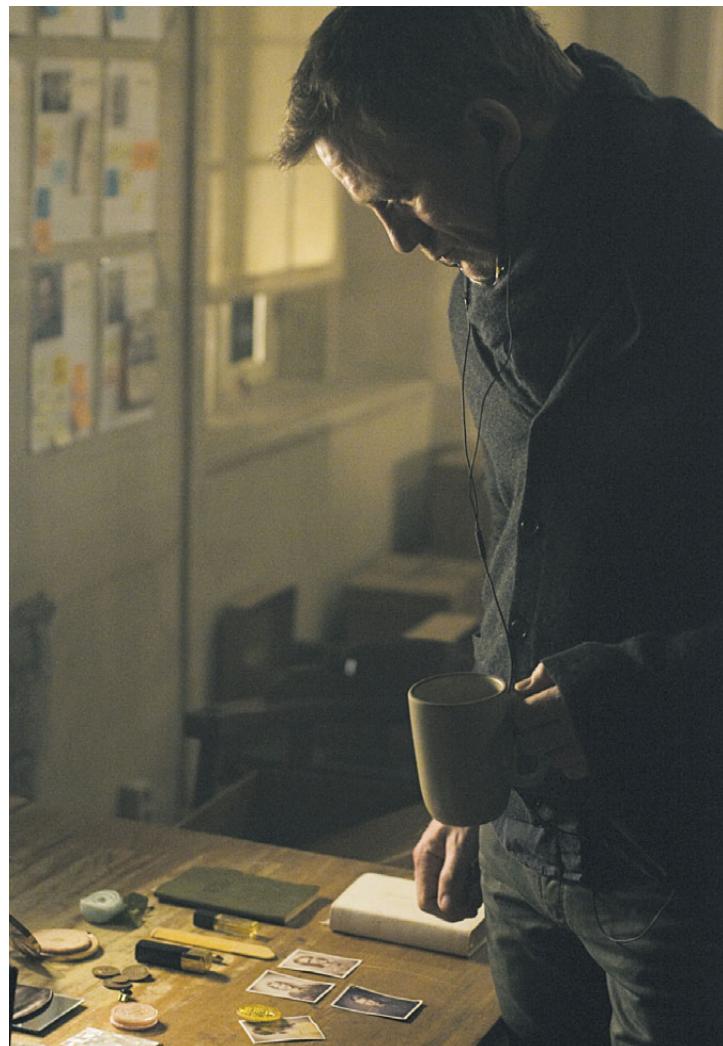
Scandinavian crime

Like the French *série noir*, the German *krimi* and the Italian *giallo*, Scandinavian stories of crime, mystery and detection have long flourished as a literary and film tradition distinct from – but

deeply indebted to – the British and American crime/mystery forms epitomised by Agatha Christie and Raymond Chandler. Barry Forshaw identifies the team of Per Wahlöö and Maj Sjöwall as the defining influence on subsequent generations of Swedish crime writers: their political *policier*s have been adapted into films both in Sweden (Bo Widerberg's *The Man on the Roof/Mannen på taket*, 1975) and the US (Stuart Rosenberg's *The Laughing Policeman/An Investigation of Murder*, 1973), and their continuing detective hero Martin Beck has been played by Walter Matthau, Derek Jacobi and (most often) Gösta Ekman.

Yellow Bird, the Swedish production company involved with both the Niels Arden Oplev and Fincher versions of Larsson's book, has already mounted Swedish and British television series drawn from Henning Mankell's series of novels about professionally perceptive yet personally shambolic Inspector Kurt Wallander. (Middle-aged plods are as commonplace in Swedish crime as on British TV; even non-cop Blomkvist falls into that category.) The Icelandic *Jar City* (*Myrin*, 2006), from the novel by Arnaldur Indridason, and the Norwegian *Headhunters* (*Hodjegerne*, 2011), from the novel by Jo Nesbø, are both in development as English-language remakes. Even more notably, the Danish TV series *The Killing* (*Forbrydelsen*, 2007) – which made a cult figure of untattooed but pullover-sporting female detective Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl) – has already captivated the UK's chattering classes in its original form, and spun off a US version. ➤

NEW AVENGERS
In David Fincher's remake, Rooney Mara, left, plays Lisbeth Salander, while Daniel Craig, right, is improbably hunky investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist



The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

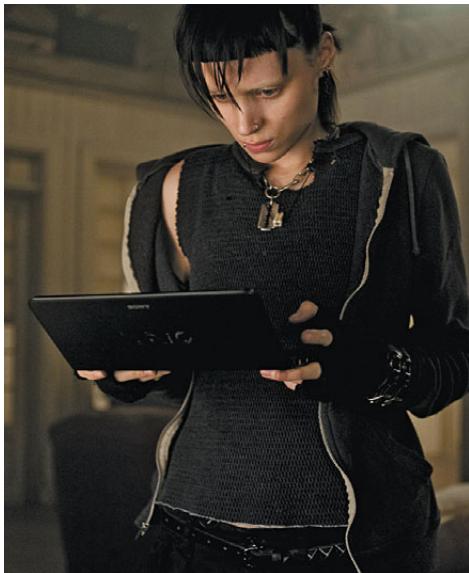
Given that Fincher brings cutting-edge Hollywood narrative skills (much needed, since Larsson's plot is astoundingly complicated) and an established set of authorial interests (serial killers feature in his *Seven* and *Zodiac*), it's almost odd that, for the most part, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* sticks to conventions familiar from the Kenneth Branagh-starring version of *Wallander*. Unlike the US takes on *The Killing* or *Let the Right One In* (*Låten rätte komma in*, 2008), which relocate respectively from Copenhagen to Seattle and Stockholm to Los Alamos, Larsson's plot and characters aren't extracted from their original context. The international success of the novels probably settled the argument early in development. But the cast are almost all Brits doing slight Swedish Chef accents: authentic Swede Stellan Skarsgård and Dutchman Yorick van Wageningen play archly in English, blending in with the likes of Craig, Steven Berkoff, Joely Richardson, Geraldine James, Julian Sands, Martin Jarvis and Donald Sumpter.

Perhaps this cosy streak isn't inappropriate to material that combines genteel and punk sensibilities, both in its protagonists and in its criminal matters. Larsson's novel already straddles the worlds of Agatha Christie and Thomas Harris, juxtaposing a kind of locked-room, all-in-the-family whodunnit with forensic, gruesome psychopathology. A journalist with a career much like Blomkvist's, Larsson died prematurely before his three novels saw print (some have said they'd have been much improved if he'd lived to complete a normal editing process). He had a social – and perhaps personal – agenda in his work, which romanticises the ability of a small-circulation, collectively run magazine to take on high-level financial corruption, people-trafficking cartels, the far right and a sinister star chamber within the security services.

Though Oplev's original *Dragon Tattoo* film had its UK debut at FrightFest, home to the likes of *Martyrs* and *The Human Centipede*, Larsson's books (published here by Quercus) were read by everybody including – indeed, especially – your parents. The mutation of Larsson's titles in translation, which he might have resisted if he'd been around, suggests a franchise becoming more biddable. *Män som hatar kvinnor* translates as *Men Who Hate Women*, a title that highlights the story's content: the interlinked circles of male persecutors who abuse Harriet Vanger and Lisbeth Salander in ways that force them to become resourceful yet near-psychopathic. Somehow, I doubt a book or film called *Men Who Hate Women* could achieve mainstream success outside Sweden.

Quercus, by contrast, chose to brand the trilogy with the overall title *Millennium*, the name of Blomkvist's magazine (thus risking confusion with the Chris Carter-created, serial-killer-themed TV series of the late 1990s, whose title suggested its short shelf life); the books' subtitles, meanwhile, refer to their break-out heroine. But renaming *Men Who Hate Women* as *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* turns a potentially depressing story about male villains into an uplifting story about a woman who opposes them. Lisbeth's intransigence only increases in the sequels, where she is pursuing her own family agenda rather than Harriet's.

In Oplev's film, Michael Nyqvist and Noomi



GIRL WITH A LAPTOP
First noticed inspiring the invention of Facebook in 'The Social Network', Rooney Mara, above, goes online again as hacker Lisbeth Salander

Rapace (both now snapped up for English-speaking supporting turns in blockbuster sequels, *Mission Impossible Ghost Protocol* and *Sherlock Holmes A Game of Shadows*) created the roles of Blomkvist and Salander, reprising them in adaptations of Larsson's other two novels (which tell one long story) as a 2009 TV series also issued as two cinema films, *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (*Flickan som lekte med elden*) and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* (*Luftslottet som sprängdes*). Note that the *Millennium* brand had by then been dropped from the films' titles, in order to further stress Salander as the franchise's selling-point.

Dynamic duo

In some respects, the Blomkvist-Salander teaming echoes the format of *The Avengers*, where the bowler-hatted John Steed (Patrick Macnee) incarnated worthy traditional values – old-Etonian charm, decency and a modest commitment to justice – while his younger, more fashionably dressed female partners (Honor Blackman, Diana Rigg, Linda Thorson, Joanna Lumley) epitomised the look of the years in which their seasons aired. This is one of the areas in which Jeremiah Chechik's disastrous 1998 film version of *The Avengers* failed: it was all right for Ralph Fiennes's clubman Steed to be as old-fashioned as ever, but Uma Thurman's 1960s holdover Emma Peel was all wrong for 1998. (Indeed, a millennial *Avengers* girl should have looked a lot like Lisbeth Salander.)

In the context of Larsson's Sweden, the bedrock values of the older, calmer, fatherly (though tom-cattish) hero aren't old-Etonian conservatism but

I doubt a book or film called 'Men Who Hate Women' could achieve mainstream success outside Sweden

1960s-style collective radicalism, a commitment to personal freedoms and opposition to entrenched interests. This teaming is the spine of Larsson's series – indeed, one of the problems with the second and third books is that Blomkvist and Salander are split up too long, both by legal circumstances and by their own character flaws.

Each of the trilogy essays a different thriller form: mystery/horror, action/adventure (with villains out of Ian Fleming) and conspiracy/court-room drama. But Blomkvist and Salander fit into all three. Both are, essentially, fantasy figures: a highly idealised (and sexually overactive) stand-in for the author and a psychically scarred superheroine. Nyqvist and Rapace play them as if they were real; in fact Rapace's performance grows in intensity over the three films, as she has to do less and less to command attention. (Her show-stopping entrance to her own trial in the third film, in the sort of get-up calculated not to endear her to a judge, is a triumphant moment.)

Craig and Mara, by contrast, fill roles that are more iconic now than they were when the Swedish films were made. Craig boasts a Bondian body few middle-aged journo could match, though it is most exposed not in the sex scenes (where he is mostly on the bottom) but when he is stripped by the most currently active serial killer in the Vanger enclave and hung up to be tortured. This passive, Pauline-tied-to-the-railroad-tracks situation requires Salander to ride to his rescue wielding a handy golf club, then leave him on the floor to pursue the malefactor on her motorbike.

As for Mara's Salander, she modifies her make-up to kabuki-demon level whenever she wants to terrorise a male sex offender, while remaining willing to go the blonde-wig/pink-outfit route whenever it suits her to change her image to pursue her ends. Without breaking the character, Fincher's film (scripted by Steven Zaillian, who previously added to the serial-killer/bestseller genre with Ridley Scott's *Hannibal*) nonetheless softens Salander's edges.

Memorable in a bit part as the girlfriend who dumps Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg in the opening scene of Fincher's *The Social Network*, but forgettable in a lead role in the 2010 remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Mara landed the role over higher-profile names (Natalie Portman, Ellen Page, Kristen Stewart). But while she may have the haunted, wounded, incipiently vampirish look of early Tilda Swinton, Mara's version of Salander is shown writhing naked on top of Craig and – in a manner that Rapace's more genuinely alien (and, curiously, sexier) Salander would scorn – splashes out on a final Christmas gift (which will be binned ungiven) with a neediness that highlights Blomkvist's shadowy role as father-lover-mentor. And after the cold and warm bodies have been dug up, blame for the couple's break is slightly shifted to stress a vulnerability that the girl in the books would never show.

Most significantly of all, Mara's Salander at one point asks Blomkvist's permission to take extra-legal action ("can I kill him?"). Rapace's Salander would never seek approval.

■ 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo' is out now, and is reviewed on page 64

IN FROM THE COLD

Hollywood's love affair with all things Nordic is no recent phenomenon. Ever since the silent era, when Swedes Victor Sjöström and Greta Garbo were lured west, America has been turning to Scandinavian movies for inspiration. By **John Wrathall**



Intermezzo (Gregory Ratoff, 1939)

Signed up by David O. Selznick, Ingrid Bergman landed her first US role in this remake of Gustaf Molander's 1936 Swedish film (right), in which she had first caught the mogul's attention. Radiantly photographed by the great Gregg Toland, she plays the piano teacher whose tempestuous Grieg duet with her young pupil's concert-violinist father (here Leslie Howard) leads to romance, before she realises she can never be more than an "intermezzo" in his life.



A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy (Woody Allen, 1982)

Made in 1955, Ingmar Bergman's turn-of-the-century romantic comedy *Smiles of a Summer Night* (*Sommarmattens leende*, right) was the credited inspiration for Stephen Sondheim's 'Send in the Clowns' musical *A Little Night Music*, itself stagily filmed with Elizabeth Taylor in 1977. But the Swedish director's most fervent American disciple, Woody Allen, clearly had the 1955 film in mind when he made this, one of his rare period efforts.



Kingdom Hospital (Craig R. Baxley, 2004)

Lars von Trier has had less impact on America than America has had on him (see *Dancer in the Dark*, *Dogville*, *Manderlay*). While none of his films has been remade, his fabulous 1994 haunted-hospital TV series *The Kingdom* (*Riget*, right) was recrafted by Stephen King, no less, as an ABC TV serial starring Bruce Davison and Andrew McCarthy – though unlike von Trier's original, the remake only lasted one season.

Insomnia (Christopher Nolan, 2002)

The Swedish-surnamed Steven Soderbergh clearly keeps an eye on Scandinavia. Following *Nightwatch*, he also helped produce the US remake of Erik Skjoldbaerg's 1997 thriller *Insomnia* (right), about a murder investigation in the far north of Norway, where the sun never sets. Alaska replaced Norway, Al Pacino replaced Stellan Skarsgård, and Christopher Nolan got his stepping stone from *Memento* to *Batman Begins*.



Brothers (Jim Sheridan, 2009)

Susanne Bier's *Brødre* (2004, right), in which a soldier presumed dead in Afghanistan (Ulrich Thomsen) returns to find his wife (Connie Nielsen) in love with his younger brother, was remade with the powerhouse awards-bait team of director Jim Sheridan and stars Natalie Portman, Jake Gyllenhaal and Tobey Maguire (in the Thomsen role). It failed to win Oscars – though Bier herself did the following year with *In a Better World*, also starring Thomsen.

Let Me In (Matt Reeves, 2010)

In the hands of the director of *Cloverfield*, this remake of Swedish vampire sensation *Let the Right One In* (*Låt den rätte komma in*, right), relocated to Reagan-era New Mexico, plays down the black humour and ups the horror (as befits its British co-producer, Hammer Films). Though the English-language version drops the original's Morrissey-inspired title, it does find room for details of John Ajvide Lindqvist's source novel not included in the earlier film.

Reader offers

COMPETITIONS

THE TIN DRUM: Five copies of Director's Cut versions to be won

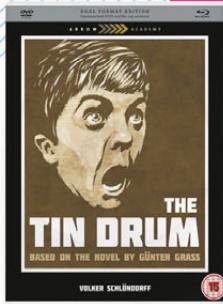
Volker Schlöndorff's Palme d'Or-winning 1979 film *The Tin Drum* tells the story of Oskar Matzerath, living in a petit-bourgeois family in Danzig during the Nazi years, who on the eve of his third birthday decides to stunt his growth. Though his mind matures, he retains a child's

perspective of Nazism. Arrow Academy presents a new restoration in a dual-format edition, including the original theatrical version plus – for the first time – the Director's Cut, which includes 20 minutes' extra footage. Special features include a commentary and interviews.

We have five copies to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which of Günter Grass's novels was the SECOND of his 'Danzig' trilogy?

- a. The Tin Drum
- b. Dog Years
- c. Cat and Mouse



WIN

FILMCRAFT: Books on 'Cinematography' & 'Editing' to be won

This new series of *FilmCraft* books from The Ilex Press focuses on key filmmaking disciplines, interviewing a host of experts in their fields. In *Cinematography* DPs including Barry Ackroyd and Seamus McGarvey speak of specific films they've worked on; the latter, for instance, unwraps *Atonement*'s five-minute tracking shot. In *Editing*, 16 of the craft's in-demand names are interviewed – including Lee Smith, who explains the rules behind editing 'puzzle movies'

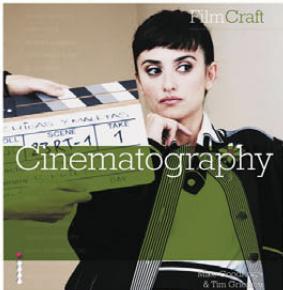
such as *The Prestige* and *Inception*. We have three pairs to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which one of these films does Seamus McGarvey also have a cinematography credit for?

- a. Coriolanus
- b. The Dark Knight
- c. We Need to Talk About Kevin

WIN



WIN 'DRIVE' + BLU-RAY PLAYER: Plus nine runner-up DVD or Blu-ray prizes

Nicolas Winding Refn's stylish action thriller *Drive* is released on Blu-ray and DVD in January. Adapted from James Sallis's 2005 novel, the film stars Ryan Gosling in the lead role as a Hollywood wheel-man for hire, stunt-driving for movie productions by day and steering getaway vehicles for armed heists by night. Courtesy of Icon, we have a top prize of a Panasonic Blu-ray player to give away with the film, plus nine runner-up prize DVD or Blu-ray editions.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state on your competition entry your preference of DVD or Blu-ray edition:

Q. In which American drama series does actor Bryan Cranston (who features in 'Drive') have the lead role?

- a. Mad Men
- b. Breaking Bad
- c. Sons of Anarchy



WIN

PEDRO ALMODOVAR ARCHIVES: Deluxe monograph to be won

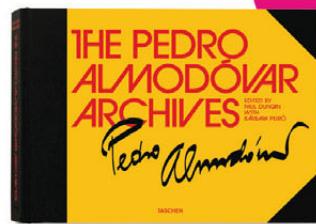
This unprecedented monograph on Pedro Almodóvar (published by TASCHEN) is a rare visual treat. An in-depth exploration of his complete oeuvre, this huge volume contains unique material from the auteur's personal archives. Some of the 600 images are never-before-published, including personal photographs taken during filming. In addition to writing

the captions for the photographs, Almodóvar also invited prominent Spanish authors to write introductions to each of the films and selected many of his own texts to accompany this visual odyssey. The book also contains a segment of film strip from *Volver*. We have a copy to give away to one lucky reader.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. In 'Talk to Her', what is the profession of the character Lydia?

- a. Flamenco dancer
- b. Bullfighter
- c. Ballet dancer



WIN

HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'The Tin Drum', 'Drive + Blu-ray Player', 'Pedro Almodóvar Archives' or 'FilmCraft books' in the subject heading, to s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'The Tin Drum competition', 'Drive + Blu-ray Player competition', 'Pedro Almodóvar Archives competition' or 'FilmCraft books competition', Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

The deadline for all competitions is Tuesday 10 January 2012

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* The prizewinners of all competitions will be picked at random and notified within ten days of the closing date.

* Employees of the BFI or companies related to the competitions are ineligible to enter.

* Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash.

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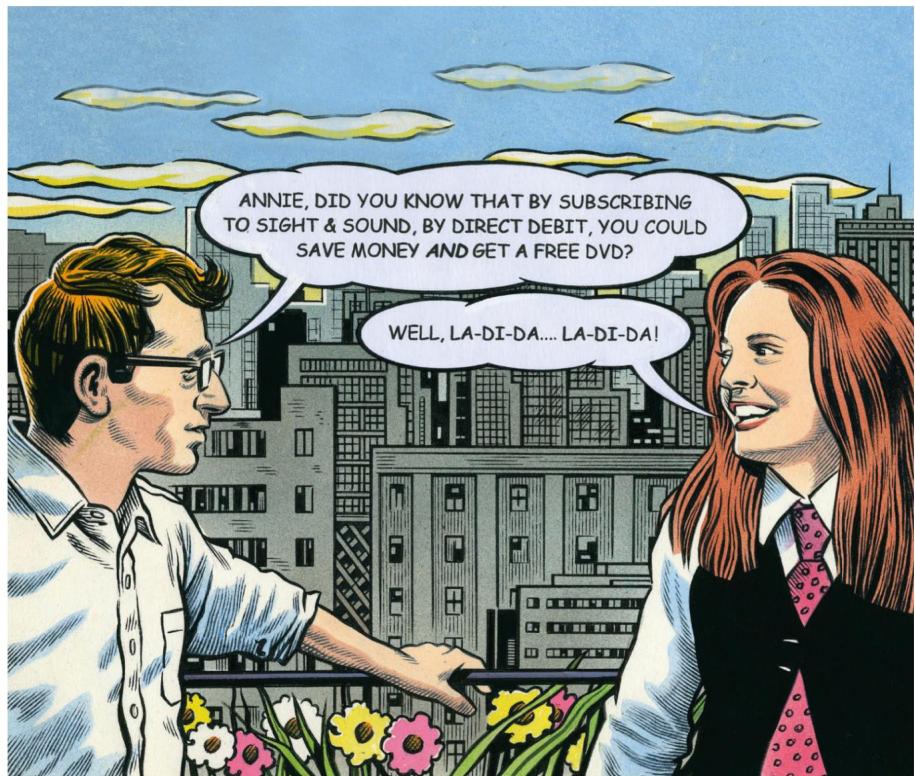
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James Hill (1962)
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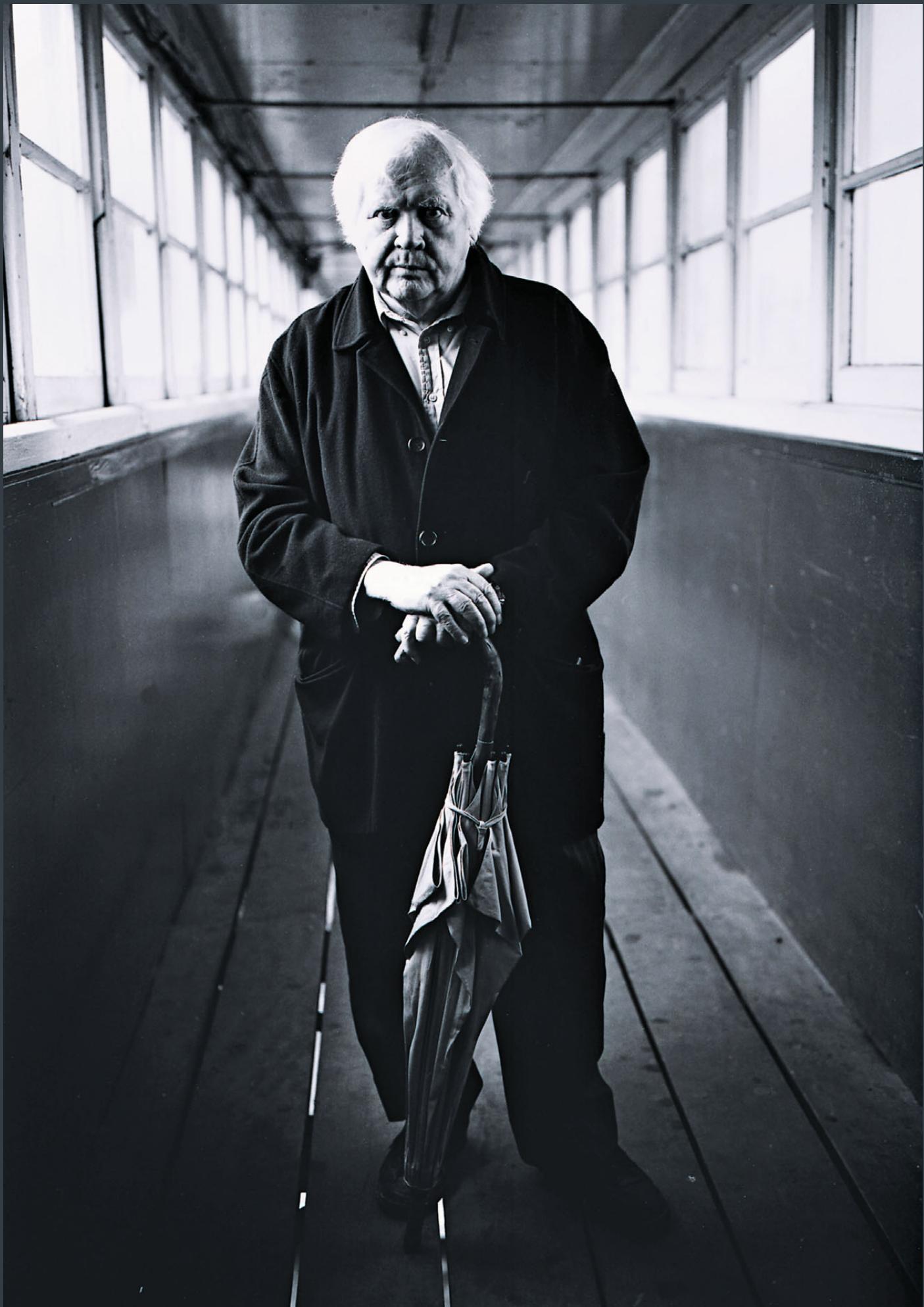
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From photographs in the 1950s and TV in the 1960s to internet movies in the 2000s, Ken Russell never stopped making images. But it was his astonishing run of 1970s features that ensured his lasting reputation, say Linda Ruth Williams and Mark Kermode

MYTHOMANIA

KEN RUSSELL 1927-2011

Ken Russell died on Sunday 27 November last year after a morning of scriptwriting, laughing and – apparently one of his favourite occupations – contemplating trees with his wife. Though his films and his public persona suggest a man who would not go gentle into that good night – “old age should burn and rave at close of day” – Ken did none of these things. Nor did he fade gracefully away. He just stopped, suddenly but peacefully, at home.

It is hard not to project onto these simple facts the very moving conclusion to Russell's 1962 BBC film *Elgar*, when the composer's hand falls still beside a gramophone as it plays a recording of 'Nimrod', the most famous movement from his 'Enigma Variations'. As the music surges, a rapturous flashback plays out – an obituary in montage form – finding the small boy in the elderly man.

There was a lot of boyishness in Russell, whose name became synonymous with the word 'maverick'. The primary definition of maverick is an animal that isn't old enough to be branded (after S.A. Maverick, the Texas cattle rancher who never marked his stock). Inflected in this way, it signifies childlessness, a refusal of constraint or categorisation. Russell may have grown old, but perhaps he never grew up. He may have died, but he left a provocative and important legacy. His work remains outrageous, exuberant, frequently vulgar, often lyrically astonishing. Although he latterly endured years in the cinematic wilderness, he never stopped working – and loving the work.

Russell was born into the era of silent movies, yet by the 21st century he was distributing films on the internet. He was a man of extremes who made a career of extremes. He fell in love with cinema the moment he entered a picturehouse in Southampton, his home city, and immediately



TRANSGRESSIVE TALENT
Hugely controversial on its first release in 1971, 'The Devils', above, is now seen as the greatest achievement of the late Ken Russell, opposite

came to associate film with high drama, extreme emotion – and sex. He soon developed a passion for fantasy and a distaste for British kitchen-sink realism. From his early moviegoing and movie projection (he raised money for the Spitfire Fund with at-home screenings) to his professional photographic work, and on into television, film, video and, latterly, independent digital filmmaking, Russell's career was one of extreme cultural change.

His work is marked by the impact of World War II on the one hand and *Celebrity Big Brother* on the other. (In 2007 he introduced himself to his young housemates as “just an old film director you won't have heard of”.) Yet in 1971 four of his films had played simultaneously in London's West End. In the 1960s he pioneered arts television; in the 1970s and 1980s he practically invented the pop video. His work defined certain elements of 1960s and 1970s style – for many people he was the pre-eminent British director of that period, a household name with a fame rivalled only by pop stars.

Though released just after his Michael Caine vehicle *Billion Dollar Brain*, it was Russell's *Women in Love* (1969) that brought him wider attention than even his television work had done, and it remains one of his best-loved films. The unbroken run of outrageous movies that followed – from *The Music Lovers* in 1970 to *Tommy* in 1975, including *The Boy Friend*, *Savage Messiah*, *Mahler* and *Lisztomania* – turned Russell into an internationally known British brand, wooed by Hollywood.

As is customary when a celebrated public figure dies, tributes from famous colleagues (and even the occasional former detractor) were unanimously warm, lamenting that Britain has failed to cherish this “appalling talent” (as one biographer called him). Summaries of his prodigious achievements highlighted more of the ups than the downs. Russell would see the irony in this: in *Lisztomania* the composer's daughter asks if her father will be using his sword to kill his critics. “Time kills the critics, my dear,” he quips, and Russell's obituaries seemed to prove this true. On release his films consistently provoked polarised reactions: adoring as well as stinking reviews, moral panics, a loyal fan base and – lately – a growing stream of serious academic scholarship.

The work he did in the 1960s for the BBC on the *Monitor* and *Omnibus* series has proved easiest to love: the part of his oeuvre it is now respectable to revere. Yet this too was deemed daring at the time, given the liberties Russell took with the ‘truth’ when weaving dramatisation around biography. The sublime visual moments of his *Song of Summer*, *The Debussy Film* or *Always on Sunday* are imagined rather than fact, a hybridisation of documentary and drama that is now commonplace, but which at the time *Monitor* producer Huw Wheldon tried to anchor back to the real.

Russell would go on to reinvent the cinematic biopic with his fantasy life stories of famous artists – Tchaikovsky in *The Music Lovers*, Henri Gaudier-►

Ken Russell



► Brzeska in *Savage Messiah*, the eponymous *Mahler* and *Valentino*. Many of the key 'Russellian' issues – Catholicism, excess, sexuality and its performance, kitsch, genius, censorship, celebrity and stardom – are discernible even in those early television films, and continued to colour his work right through to his 2009 film about Boudicca.

His later, self-funded shorts have appealed primarily to hardcore Russellians – a tribe of dedicated fans who have established him as cult director par excellence and have, through festivals and fanzines, kept talking about those less appreciated theatrical releases (*Gothic*, *Salome's Last Dance*, *The Lair of the White Worm*) as well as what Russell called his 'garagiste' films (made in his garage in the New Forest) – *The Fall of the Louse of Usher* and *Revenge of the Elephant Man*.

Then there are the films whose shock value provoked scandal on a national scale. The nude male-wrestling sequence from *Women in Love* was probably the first to generate a tabloid campaign of outrage, but it was helped past the censors by its literary origins (D.H. Lawrence's novel of the same name). Then came *The Devils* (1971) – dismissed at the time as unforgivably over the top, but now increasingly regarded as an overlooked milestone of British cinema. Based on allegations of demonic possession which climaxed in the public burning of Father Urbain Grandier in the French city of Loudun in 1634, this incendiary gem boasted brilliantly modernist production design by fledgling artist Derek Jarman, typically bold costumes from Shirley Russell (Ken's first wife and long-time collaborator), breathtaking cinematography by David Watkin and an electrifying score by Peter Maxwell Davies. Russell would later call it "my most, indeed my only political film".

Compositional eye

Russell was of course a keen adaptor of literary texts, not least works by D.H. Lawrence (in addition to *Women in Love*, his feature film of *The Rainbow* appeared in 1989, and the BBC series *Lady Chatterley* in 1993). Yet he was not a wordy director: actors report that he was more interested in getting the visuals right than in directing their dialogue. This keen compositional eye was first seen in his early photographic work from the 1950s (some of it for *Picture Post*), recently exhibited in a gorgeous touring retrospective.

Russell's brilliant moving-image conceits are slipped into bizarre and daring narratives to produce stand-alone moments of beauty and excess: think of the drowned bodies locked in a sensual embrace in the drained lake of *Women in Love*; Glenda Jackson writhing in a frenzy of sexual frustration in *The Music Lovers*; the abstract Busby Berkeley-esque body patterns whirling through

POLYMATH

Ken Russell found inspiration in Bram Stoker ('The Lair of the White Worm', left), The Who ('Tommy', centre) and classical music ('Lisztomania', right)

The Boy Friend, a robed Kathleen Turner singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers' as she straddles Anthony Perkins in *Crimes of Passion* (1984).

The Devils was also an adaptation, drawing both on a stage play by John Whiting and Aldous Huxley's book (which memorably likened an exorcism to "a rape in a public toilet"). It was highly controversial from the outset. Originally written for United Artists, the project was dropped when "somebody actually read the script". It was subsequently picked up by Warners, who would later tell Russell that they "had never seen the like of this disgusting shit!" Savage cuts were demanded both by the censors and (more importantly) the studio, with the now notorious 'Rape of Christ' sequence being deleted in its entirety. Even in its variously censored versions, many local councils ignored its X rating and simply banned *The Devils* outright. Forty years later, this misunderstood masterpiece has lost none of its seditious power – a forthcoming BFI DVD release will present the original UK X-rated cut for the first time, but Warners have yet to bring themselves to release Russell's director's cut (including the Rape of Christ sequence), which was proudly unveiled at the National Film Theatre in 2004.

As with so much of Russell's work, the scandal surrounding *The Devils* has often caused its true value to be overlooked. Far from being merely an orgy of excess, the film is both a visceral depiction of mass hysteria (Russell called it "a story about brainwashing") and a serious meditation on the nature of false idols – something that recurs throughout Russell's oeuvre.

This theme was also central to *Tommy*, his electrifying adaptation of The Who's rock opera, which first attracted him precisely because of the uncanny way in which Pete Townshend's story mirrored his own obsessions with the corruption of the messianic. As different as the two films may be, there are clear comparisons to be made between the sight of crazed nuns ravishing a life-sized statue of Christ in *The Devils*, and the 'Eyesight to the Blind' sequence from *Tommy*, in which worshippers seek a healing touch from a statue of Marilyn Monroe, which promptly comes crashing to the ground. For Russell, who once said that "a light went on" when he first converted to Catholicism, the interplay between the divine and the depraved was nowhere more clearly expressed than in the fetishised trappings of organised religion, which seemed eerily similar to the false gods of fame and fortune. No wonder he cast Ringo Starr as the Pope in *Lisztomania*.

Still, Russell also had his heroes, and his creative studies of them are part-homage, part-analysis of fame and genius. Russell often wrote about himself, but he also spent a lot of time trying to get inside the heads, hearts and bodies of fellow artists. *Lisztomania* was critically reviled on its release, but the audacity of recasting a 19th-century composer as a 20th-century rock star gave Russell free rein. It is almost an answer to Gaudier-Brzeska's complaint in *Savage Messiah* that classical art is dead, its forms and figures having "no holes, no muscles, and no mystery".

Though Russell was often associated with vulgarity and the popular, his idols were high cultural icons. He did not come from a traditionally 'cultured' home, though he went on to direct opera and ballet as well as film and TV. Russell's passion for 19th-century European music began in adolescence, and was as untutored and instinctive as most of his enthusiasms. He often said that Tchaikovsky saved his life. Elgar was another hero, and the model for his unorthodox patriotism (he said he was "as British as Elgar").

Russell was also something of a star himself. Titling his 1989 autobiography *A British Picture* suggests not just an ambivalence about nationhood, but also a cheeky awareness that he was the picture. His works remain immodest, immoderate, precisely lyrical – just like the man himself. He could be by turns cantankerous and bossy, shy and cosily domesticated. In his last 20 years he combined new work with attending tribute events, lending his mighty presence to others' pleasure in his legacy. Surveying a life at its end is akin to Thompson's search for the man behind the myth in *Citizen Kane* (of course, the parallels between the two men's careers have been noted): find the keys and you open the man.

Perhaps Russell's own approach to the filmic biography might provide that key. In 1966 he said: "One must treat one's subjects not as historical characters but as living people... I am interested in failures or people who have had a tremendous struggle all their lives." This is true of his studies of artists, but perhaps it is most true of Ken himself. For all the flash and panache of his visualisations, his was always a Romantic search for self. "Everybody's looking for their true selves," says William Hurt in Russell's woefully underrated psychedelic sci-fi *Altered States* (1980). "I think that that true self, that original self, that first self is a real, mensurate, quantifiable thing – tangible and incarnate. And I'm going to find the fucker!" We won't know now whether Russell ever did "find the fucker", but we sure had fun watching him try.

► *'The Devils'* is released on BFI DVD in its original UK X-rated cut on 19 March

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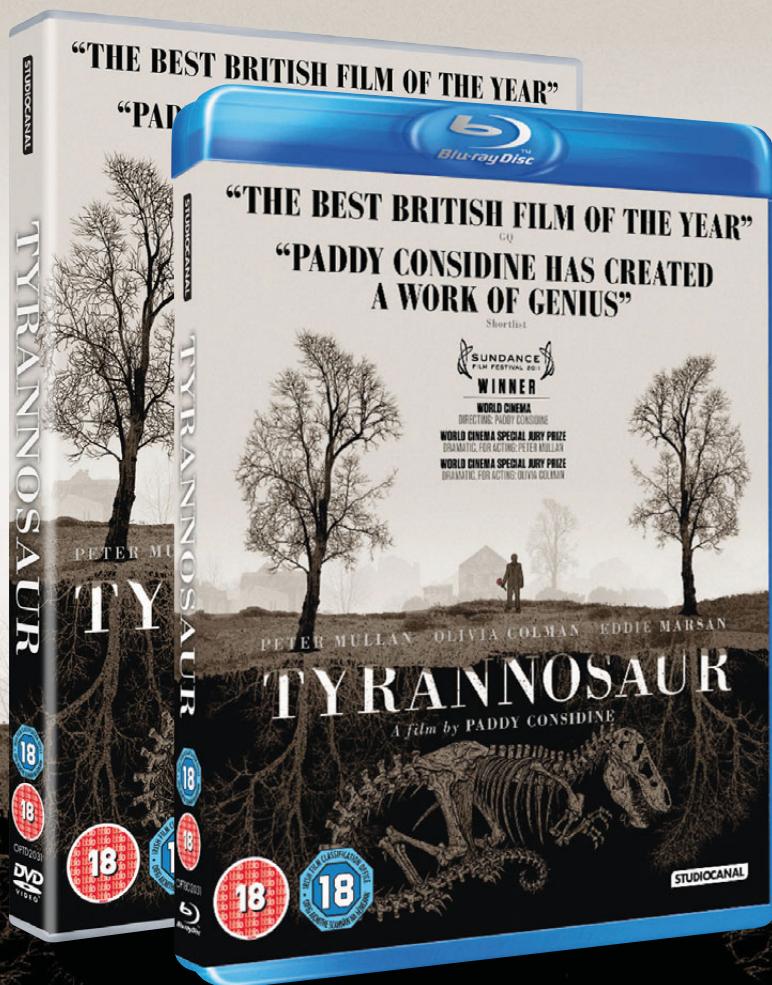
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Two-Lane Blacktop begins in night. On the street, among a spreading ripple of attendants, functionaries: the court of Louis XIV as a bar brawl. Hell's Angels scurry around fetish cars, obscured by exhaust clouds, tyre spray. You can't see the angelic or Luciferian faces; mostly what you catch are their 'colours' (keep that technical phrase to hand). The race begins: a scream of sound compressed into smoke and syllable. A custom car *om*. Revving up, inside and out. Smoke, fumes, fire. Alchemy under the hood, down the line.

Descartes teaches that one should disregard the flesh, which is beyond our comprehension, and attend to the machine within... to what can be made useful for work, and, in the event of any fault, either repaired or discarded.

W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*

*I'm waiting for something to take place
Something to take me away from this race
Round city to city, town to town...
Little Feat, 'Skin It Back'*

Two-Lane Blacktop, 40 years on, and Monte Hellman's light touch and precise editing are things to marvel at. He packs so much in, without seeming to pack anything in at all. Two guys in a car, locked in silence. Speed is assumed rather than shown. Transitions aren't emphasised. One moment it's midnight, the next it's morning. Dusk at the edge of sleeping towns. Night air, velocity, comedown.

These conscript-age guys have no discernible past and no uttered names: James Taylor is The Driver and Dennis Wilson is The Mechanic – for the purposes of the script, at any rate. In the film itself, they're name-free, streaky Buddhas throwing themselves into fires of pointless competition. It's

not so much that they don't show weakness – they don't show much of anything. Tucked inside their blue-grey, four-wheel shark, it's not clear what, if anything, they take in. When they challenge other racers, the money they win (or lose) doesn't seem to matter – it's only there to enable another race, in another town. When the flaky middle-aged cruiser G.T.O. (Warren Oates) pushes them to a longer trial – a race to Washington for each other's rides – it's laid-back to the point of coma. Machismo as a higher form of idling.

All this – the pointless and circular quest shruggerly accepted; the trek through endless American space; strained male partnership; complicating female presence – recalls Hellman's two 1960s westerns (especially 1966's *The Shooting*, a neglected masterpiece) and anticipates writer Rudy Wurlitzer's script for Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (1973). And it's not a half-bad idea to watch *Two-Lane Blacktop* again with the idea of

Ian Penman can't get enough of Monte Hellman's cult 1971 feature 'Two-Lane Blacktop'. Forty years old and out on Blu-ray for the first time, it's one icon of post-60s counterculture that hasn't dated, but now seems darker, sadder and more beautiful than ever

LOST HIGHWAY



COUNTRY ROAD
James Taylor, opposite, brought his singer-songwriter cool to the role of The Driver, who takes to the road in his Chevy with The Mechanic (Dennis Wilson, left, on bonnet) and The Girl (Laurie Bird)



Two-Lane Blacktop



chemical intake seems limited to a couple of melancholy belts of booze.)

As the Driver, Taylor is prickly, with the eyes of a desert creature who is hungry but bored by the prospect of further blood. The darkling gleam in those eyes stands in for a certain wider (anti-)social mood. Drugs had turned things bad – meaning not just the obvious ODs like Hendrix or Janis (and these only the visible, fatal ones), but a wider sense that hippie optimism had become clammy paranoia, a world of mutual suspicion and rip-off. The post-Altamont mood: downers, petty squabbles, serious damnation. A whole dark stain of mission creep, under the nerveless mainstream smile. The Stones' woozy, crackling *Exile on Main St.* (1972) could serve as an apt subtitle for *Two-Lane Blacktop*. "I'm zipping through the days/At lightnin' speed..."

Pitch around in time a bit and you can tick off a whole line of references worth pursuing, like Neil Young's so-called 'Ditch trilogy' (1973-75): *Time Fades Away*, *On the Beach*, *Tonight's the Night*. Multiple references to wheels, journeys, life on the road, a sense of lost direction. *Tonight's the Night* is dedicated to needle casualty Danny Whitten of Crazy Horse, who in a span of months went from looking like a young Dennis Wilson to a Civil War corpse out of Peckinpah. *On the Beach*'s pivotal song is 'Revolution Blues', with its ambiguous, Mansonish mouthpiece: "I hear that Laurel Canyon/Is full of famous stars/But I hate them worse than lepers/And I'll kill them in their cars." A crucial influence on Young during this period was Jack Nitzsche who, as well as being a semi-permanent ghost at various LA back-room feasts, wrought a whole line of innovative film scores: *Performance*, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Cutter's Way*, *Blue Collar*.

The same mood (prickly heat, shrunken horizons) can be found in various contemporaneous movies. Permanent hangover, violent fatalism, weary treks into nowhere land: *Mean Streets*, *Pat Garrett, Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, *Big Wednesday*. Quest films that doubt the point of questing any more, just kind of shrug and sit it out this time round. Buddy films that end in enmity, squalid betrayal. *Two-Lane* is a study in parallel loneliness; or rather – and which is not the same thing – finding someone to be lonely with.

The Driver and the Mechanic don't do slick he-guy dialogue; they seem welded inside their own comfortable, engulfing silence. But it's a warm connective silence. They may not win many I-Spy points, but you can sense them listening – listening for undertones in the engine's purr and rumble that others will never hear. Acts of machine empathy.

Dead men riding

Since this is a film mag, and I only have so many words, I'll assume you know a bit more about Monte Hellman and Warren Oates. But it might help to know that screenwriter Rudy Wurlitzer is and was something of a reader in Eastern philosophies. (This world a shadow play, enacted by hungry ghosts.) And that Hellman was swayed by Wurlitzer's first novel *Nog* (1969). Excerpt: "Meredith is driving, and the radio plays Western music. We're travelling very fast. We might be following someone or being followed. I've been

It's a study in parallel loneliness; or rather – which is not the same thing – finding someone to be lonely with

western music in your head. These are nothing if not modern-day gunslingers.

James Taylor exudes this blank insouciance, both raw and misty – a rough sketch for what would come to be called 'slacker'. A slacker, except focused like a Zen archer. A Zen archer with lazy-eyed junkie sexiness – a vibe Taylor carried over from real life. Before he became the model 1970s singer/songwriter, 'Sweet Baby James' was solid junkie through and through – Chet Baker with a Gibson acoustic and workhouse denim; the public image of hokey introspection belied a private life of some turmoil and slide. Here he has a look in his eyes that can't be taught – both sleep-walk and switchblade.

Dennis Wilson likewise had what is known as an eventful private life: various bad scenes constellated round outer Los Angeles – a world where dysfunction and charisma went arm in belt. In real life, Dennis had his own soul brother with bad charisma, shackled light (but was he named Brian, or Charlie?).

Books could be written about the psychic topography of this other Los Angeles, its long slow nights. One of its best chroniclers is the Joan Didion of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and *The White Album*; her description of a surly, goof-off Jim Morrison in the latter could stand in for our two lone roadsmen. Simultaneously spaced and brittle, groovy and neurotic, Jimbo was style-example, leader of the pack: mountain-man beard, beer belly, blacked-out eyes, deepening vices. "I want to appear fat and ugly on the cover of *Time*, the ultimate revenge." Mr Mojo Risin'? No – Fass-binder, actually, shortly before his premature exit.

But the motto holds good for this counterculture of soul loss, blood fog, ODs of everything.

And, here and there, a few unexpected gems. While brother Brian hid out under the sheets like a robber on the lam, and Mike Love did his best to make the name Beach Boys taste sour – a miasma of bad choices, fallings out, neo-Republican pop – Dennis Wilson started to write his own songs, and would later release the gorgeous *Pacific Ocean Blue* (1977). Music that alternates between surprising zest, nature worship, white-boy hosanna; songs so bruised they are hard to take.

He teetered, teetered further, on a sandy line between smooth-pop breakthrough and awful self-parody. He began work on an abortive follow-up, *Bamboo* – a self-portrait in slurred abandon that actually sounds haggard. It wasn't clear how aware he was of any of this. It never will be, now. He was claimed by his mother the ocean.

Here, in *Two-Lane Blacktop*, Wilson still looks wonderful: precise, self-contained, suppressing his lusty good humour, he's a priapic white-T faun born from a crucible of surf, hot rods, sun. (He's like the beach-ball positive of Jagger's shut-in troll in *Performance*.)

Taylor and Wilson are both excellent in *Two-Lane Blacktop* – it's European non-acting, only with a sly American spritz of hip. (Taylor seems a natural for one of Bresson's 1970s films like *The Devil, Probably*.) Neither seems anxious or awkward in front of Hellman's camera. It's all in the posture – opaque, italicised, druggy: Taylor caveman hunched, Wilson like a series of smoke signals. (The film itself is not up-front druggy at all. Go-faster pills are mentioned, but the Driver's

asleep." We've all been asleep – but soon will be jolted awake.

Hellman himself has a face out of a 19th-century sepia print. At some point Oates seems to have become Hellman's alter ego: wiry, gecko-skinned, using his big commercial grin to guard a deeper seam of contemplation and (perhaps) sadness. Which is pretty much the formula the films betray, too. (Hellman was not taken early by the Romantic disease of 'originality', relying instead on genre flits and skeins.)

It would be good to pull in here, and cast a fresh eye over Hellman's next film, the infamous *Cockfighter* (1974). Again, Oates and Harry Dean Stanton. Again, American back roads. Again, a weird off-road competitive subculture. Again, a steely 'pro' mentality in a world of amateurs. The very opposite of genteel. "Well, winning is the name of the game." Note that during a motel heist the robbers wear Nixon masks. (Also, that the boys on the blacktop have something of the 'thousand-yard stare' of returning Vietnam vets.)

With earlier works like *Ride in the Whirlwind* (1965) and *The Shooting*, Hellman established his own elegantly dusty signature. Dead men riding. The pointlessness of great quests. A compass in the corner, emptiness in the eyes, all the characters heartsick before the ride even begins. Lowering skies, over the great American vastness. Freedom just another word for total immobility, being plum out of choices. A kind of 'freedom' that can make the celebrants so brittle they snap at the least provocation. However neurasthenic the underlying ethos, Hellman's eye luxuriates in the horizontals of American travel: the spaces between bodies, cars, words, lives. All this American space and emptiness – and it echoes with a familiar, self-pitying cry. "Don't crowd me!" snarls Oates at the two (younger, faster) mag-wheel pilgrims.

*Nobody listens to silence
Like your girl.*

Ryan Adams, 'Nobody Listens to Silence'

And The Girl? How did that happen? No transition, no backstory – she simply materialises like a Manson-family wraith. Played by Laurie Bird, she has this unreadable profile, looking sometimes a thousand years old, and then – as when she glides to a truck-stop jukebox singing 'Satisfaction' (like Cat Power before the fact) – she looks about 12, prompting some very Oedipal thoughts about this grid she's fallen onto.

Is this mental toughness or shoplifted jargon: "What is this, some kinda masculine power trip?" She distrusts the guys' silence – reads it as power ploy, passive-aggressive crowd-out. Looking for resemblances to herself, with her Native American beads and pop songs, she distrusts their lack of paraphernalia; for all the outward signs (ie none), they could be tech crew on an aircraft carrier. They don't sport hippie clothes or spout hippie jargon (one of the reasons the film hasn't dated), and she doesn't find the reflection she's scanning the horizon for in any of it; she splits, at the drop of a bag, and moves on, fracturing this auto-centric family. (In other studiedly groovy, Aspen-existentialist films of the 1970s, it's the huffy, truth-telling guy who moves on, as per *Five Easy Pieces*.)

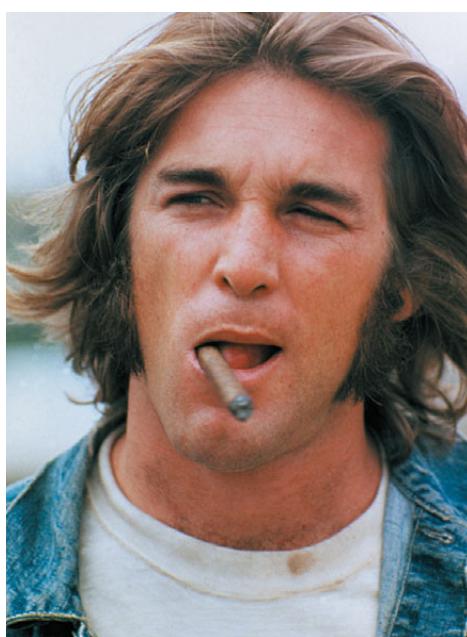
The Girl proves fatal, because although misty, she is a tangible distraction; she introduces desire into this perfectly balanced but also perfectly arid equation. The Driver doesn't even know what goes on under his hood – that is the Mechanic's thing. The Driver needs emptiness of mind – no-mind – the ability not so much to concentrate as to be unswerving, an arrow.

Likewise Oates's G.T.O. – who continually spouts sex talk and romance dance, but it's so much hazy spume, really, it doesn't connect with anything. When Harry Dean Stanton's gay hitch-hiker makes a grab for his perfectly tailored leg, it's rejected not because Oates is offended at any implied sodality, but because it would be a distraction. His snappy "I'm not into that!" could mean anything, everything, nothing. I'm not into – this life? Bodies? Embodiment?

If G.T.O. is a Mephistophelean tempter, he's an odd one. He's an ineffectual seducer who fools no one, bores everyone – most of all himself. This ferryman has been travelling his road for an eternity – no wonder he's bored. The tales he spins are to amuse himself now, not the human confetti he conveys for a stretch, between innocence and fall. If his lies and fables were more convincing... But maybe that's the point: the toxin he seeds in your mind isn't a glimpse of another world, but just pure distilled doubt. Doubt about everything. Including his existence.

G.T.O.'s got the car and the lingo and the clothes, but the vibe is pure walk-in. Then there's this one moment when the fire inside is stoked and he challenges the boys. "Couple of punk road hogs," he spits, as if smoothing his own eyebrows in a smeary truck-stop mirror. "Suck you right up my tail pipe!" (Make of that last line what you will.) The second his ire rises, the stance changes from mark to duellist. A hair-trigger hip-shift from putty to concrete; hands of clay inside custom-made gloves. Those pretty leather gloves are the only

I GET AROUND
**Dennis Wilson, below, as The Mechanic; opposite,
left to right: director Monte Hellman, Warren Oates
(G.T.O.) and James Taylor (The Driver)**



thing about him that remains constant. If you want to play a *Two-Lane* drinking game, keep an eye out for G.T.O.'s fine wool jumpers. A fan of soft peacock bristles. A spin cycle of seven discrete shades. (Pale blue. Green. Dark blue. Red. Yellow. Black. Rust.) And then, right before the end – note it well, Hellman times it to perfection – he shifts back into pale blue again.

It's a gunslinger thing. The boys are the same. "Gee Mister..." reeling in the fish. And then, when the fish is on the line, the body lingo shifts – *POW!* – into withering contempt. As for the face-off between the boys and G.T.O., the race – such as it is – is for "pink slips". It's more phallic ownership they're betting, not the thing itself. A rainbow made of wool. A shadow play. Western music. "Where we headed?" "East."

Silent witness

If *Two-Lane* were to be remade by a post-Tarantino hipster, the air would be thick with guy-to-guy dialogue, reference fencing, soft-headed 'bromance'. That the original isn't is one reason it hasn't dated. Not only hasn't it dated, it's one of those films that are litmus tests for your own ageing. Each new viewing may excite entirely contrary responses down the years. (*Performance* would be the British version.) Before this latest viewing, I remembered it as verging-on-too-studied, a film drawn in decidedly neutral tones. Watching it again, I was surprised and jolted – by how much darker and sadder and more affecting it was, but also how much funnier. This last is in large part down to Oates, whose delicate performance is just a marvel. A lesson in screen acting: he does nothing, and it conveys everything.

How much more beautiful, too. There are moments along the way that recall the photographs of Robert Frank, William Eggleston, Larry Clark. One scene near the end may be one of the most beautiful shots I know in American cinema. Just a view out onto truck-stop tarmac. No people. Some cast-off luggage. Centre frame, a tiny Kodak sign. That's all, and it grabs the heart.

Throughout the film, the Driver has been dead to the landscape around him. Right at the end, before his final ride, he briefly pauses to look out onto adjacent country – and the moment has emotive power out of all proportion to the still, small gesture. A mopy girl in a tacky motel room, Oates's gloves and grin, snub-nosed custom cars, scuzzy R&B on a jukebox: these are not higher things. But they can make your soul sing, sometimes, when the night-time air is right.

It starts in the hell of competition, alienation, racing for the finish line. And ends in self-elected cremation, burnt-out eyes, crucifixion with your hands on the wheel. A circle within four circles, and an end that may never arrive. Nothing left to do but feel the wind on your face...

It's only later you realise: *Two-Lane Blacktop* begins in darkness, and ends in an abrupt jump into chastening light. Almost as if someone had been asleep, and was about to awake. And a hesitant, half-lucid feeling forms, that this will all start over again, one more time.

■ *'Two-Lane Blacktop'* is released on Blu-ray on 23 January in Eureka!'s Masters of Cinema series

Bertrand Bonello's new film 'House of Tolerance' is set almost entirely in a turn-of-the-century Parisian brothel. But fed up with being labelled a director of overtly sexual films, Bonello has opted for a gentler, more lyrical approach, he tells **Catherine Wheatley**

'TIS PITY SHE'S A WHORE



A camera slides through the opening sequences of Bertrand Bonello's *House of Tolerance* (*L'Apollonide: Souvenirs de la maison close*), and a lithe, feline beauty clad in gauzy fabric drifts down the jade halls in an opium haze, murmuring, "I could sleep a thousand years." Some hundred years later, at the film's end, she is still awake and trawling the grim and grey boulevards of Paris for strangers who will pick her up in their clapped-out Renaults. The life of a prostitute is, it seems, an eternal purgatory.

As the film gently unfurls itself, however, one could be forgiven for thinking at times that the life of a prostitute wasn't all bad. Set for the most part in 1900, in a decadent brothel (or 'house of tolerance', as they were known at the time in France) named L'Apollonide, the film conjures its interior spaces as a dreamlike sanctuary. Here, male clients are offered respite from their complicity in the structuring of a new century, while the girls sip wine from crystal goblets and curl their naked bodies around one another.

Unsurprisingly, Bonello has faced accusations of nostalgia, romanticism and flagrant misogyny (although, as the director himself puts it, "It's

hard to be nostalgic for a time you've never lived through"). For Bonello, this is nothing new: since the release of 2001's *The Pornographer* (*Le Pornographe*), his work has been accorded the dubious honour of being grouped with that of Gaspar Noé, Philippe Grandrieux and Bruno Dumont as part of what international critics have called the 'New French Extremism'. Bonello nonchalantly shrugs off such labels: "It's something that happens in a few countries outside France – that we're all lumped together like this." Still, he points out, "It's a little lazy: there are many, many differences between us, and between my own films even. I'd like to think my work was a little more gentle than some of these other filmmakers."

It's a result, perhaps, of his more moderate approach that Bonello hasn't seen the same international success as many of his compatriots. Indeed, anyone expecting a Noé-style maelstrom of sex and violence from his most recent film will be disappointed. Somewhat surprisingly given its setting, *House of Tolerance* foregoes graphic sex altogether. Instead, its focus is the passing from one era to the next; as one century turns into the next, capitalism and commodification tighten their sweaty grip on society and the brothel alike.

The rupture between old and new is most cruelly wrought on the regal Madeleine (Alice Barnole): once "the century's great beauty", she begins the 1900s as "The Woman Who Laughs", her face twisted into a scarred rictus grin by a psychotic client in the film's one moment of graphic brutality. Madeleine's mutilation leaves its own scar on Bonello's film, imbuing all that comes after it with a haunting sense of the precarious. The girls rally around their crumpled princess, tending to her wounds and salving her soul. Their relationships – not with their clients, but with each other – are the centre around which the film's skittering, circular structure revolves.

Their tenderness towards each other is reflective of the fond eye Bonello has always turned towards the porn stars, prostitutes, killers and cultists who people his films, notably *The Pornographer*, *Tiresia* (2003) and *De la guerre* (2008). Bonello does not judge the residents of L'Apollonide, although many of them have chosen to work there – preferring sex work to gruelling manual labour in mills or factories. Trapped as they are in an enduring cycle of indenture to their madam, their only hope lies with the clients themselves, should one wish to permanently purchase what they currently rent by the hour, setting them up as a full-time mistress.



Bonello and his wife and cinematographer Josée Deshaies manipulate time and space to carve out an endless night, through which the residents of the brothel sleepwalk. As the film progresses, the atmosphere becomes more and more fetid: disease and depravity thread their way through bodies and minds; dreams turn to nightmares. The film's French subtitle *Souvenirs de la maison close* ("memories of the private club") goes some way to signalling the film's unique atmosphere—oneiric, exotic, yet stifling, claustrophobic. Like a sickly sweet perfume—or, as one of the women so eloquently declaims, “the stink of sperm and champagne”.

Catherine Wheatley: Where did the desire to make a film set in a brothel come from?

Bertrand Bonello: I really wanted to make a film with a group of actresses, but I didn't want to use a contemporary setting with the usual problems—boyfriends, jobs and so on. I tried to think of something stronger as a concept, and then I had this intuition that a brothel would be a fantastic place to do a film with women. I started to do some historical research, and as I got further into it I became quite attached to these women. And at the same time I grew more and more convinced that this would be a very cinematic setting.

HOUSE OF WOMEN

Bonello, top, wanted to work with an ensemble of actresses, including Noémie Lvovsky as the madam, centre pic, and Céline Sallette, above on left

CW: What research did you do into the lives of the women who worked in such establishments? The detailing of their hygiene routines, for example, is particularly rich.

BB: To begin, I read a few books by journalists—one in particular by Laure Adler, who is a very famous feminist writer. She had done a great job of detailing day-to-day life in the brothel. Then I went to the police archives, which was fascinating. I sought out letters and diaries, and did some visual research. I looked at a lot of paintings—not only for the visuals, but for their detail. I also found some photos, but these were obviously from a slightly later period.

CW: There's quite a painterly look to the film. It put me in mind of Degas and Renoir, especially the latter's 'Sleeping Bather'.

BB: It's true that these men knew these kind of places quite well. And sometimes they even paid with paintings! But we really did a lot of research into the lighting of the brothel during this period—what kind of candles they used, what kind of electric lamps, how many, that kind of thing. So maybe after a while we had in front of us

exactly the same vision as these painters did during their era.

CW: We venture out of the cloistered world of the brothel only once in the film, when the women go bathing.

BB: The girls were not allowed to go outside. But once a month, the mistress would take them for a walk, to get them some fresh air, and to have a day off. So this scene also came directly from research: they would go to the countryside once in a while, and I wanted to capture this. I'd decided to really stick to the facts of life in these brothels, and to stick with the girls themselves, which is why we don't see anything other than this scene of life beyond the house of tolerance.

CW: Within the brothel itself, there is a contrast between the spaces of the upstairs and the downstairs, as well as day and night. Where did you shoot the film?

BB: We shot in a castle that's about 30 kilometres outside Paris. We used it like a studio, but with real walls. In Paris the brothels were buildings with six or eight or ten floors, and each floor had its purpose. Of course, the higher up you go, the more impoverished they become. I really wanted the film to be a film of contrasts. You have the luxury of the first four floors and the poverty of the top ones. You have the day and the night, the champagne and the disease.

TABLEAU VIVANT

A milieu frequented by artists, the turn-of-the-century brothel is depicted in painterly images by Bonello's DP, his wife Josée Deshaies

◀ **CW:** It's quite a mysterious space, one that's difficult for the spectator to navigate.

BB: I wanted it to be mysterious. What was very difficult was the relationship with space, because you don't have any space – it's like a box. But it's also what interests me: how to move inside the box. So the relationship with space is also a relationship with time. I tried to create an impression of space in time, as I didn't have any space in the space!

CW: Your use of time in the film is intriguing. It repeats and stutters – and it's somehow circular.

BB: Little by little, you lose the sense of time, like in a dream. At first it's quite clear when it's day, when it's night, but after a while you don't know what time it is, what month it is. And also we have this repetition, and the split screen, which tries to show what's happening at the same time in different places. I think all these devices came from my fear of a lack of space. The scenes that concern Madeleine are a little different: what happens to her at the beginning is a big trauma and everything is packed up in dense layers. Over the course of the film she reconsiders the trauma and these layers reveal themselves, until everything is visible.

CW: Where did the idea for the mutilation of Madeleine come from?

BB: Usually I never use dreams for writing, because I think it's dangerous. But at the very beginning of the film's creation, when I was starting to write the screenplay, I had the same dream three nights in a row, about the [1928 silent] film *The Man Who Laughs*, which I saw when I was a kid. And on the fourth morning I said to myself that maybe I should try to include it, since it was so weird, this dream that kept coming again and again. So I created the character of the woman who laughs, and very quickly it gave me a kind of dramatic skeleton to the film.

CW: At the end of 'House of Tolerance', images from Madeleine's dreams – the emerald, the masked man – become part of real life.

BB: It's like a collective dream, in fact. The image of the emerald is the dream of all of the girls – that's why I used the same stone throughout the film. And the masked man is the nightmare of them all.

CW: As the film draws to an end, l'Apollonide is closing. The very final image – set in the present – suggests a great sense of loss.

BB: I admit it's a melancholic film. There are not many changes for these girls. Clotilde [Céline Sallette], for example, starts the movie by saying, "I could sleep a thousand years"; her last sentence is, "I don't know what I'm going to do now." To find her 100 years later, still a prostitute, is a cinematographic gesture: it says that her destiny is to be a whore for life. But the other reason for that final scene is that, as a film, it becomes like a hypnotic matrix – it lulls us. I wanted to rupture this with a return to reality. So that's why in the last scene we suddenly return to the present.

CW: Was the urge to prevent us being hypnotised by the lush atmosphere of the brothel also behind the anachronistic soundtrack, from artists such as Lee Moses and The Moody Blues?



'The way that prostitution stood in relation to society a hundred years ago is not the same as it is today'

BB: It's one of the reasons, especially for the use of 'Nights in White Satin'. I was listening to this music while I was writing, and for me there was an emotional relationship between these deeply heartbreak songs and what these girls endure. But I didn't want the music to work as a Brechtian device – it came more from a desire to put together two things that moved me, and in so doing create something new, a third emotional force.

CW: How would you respond to critics who claim the film romanticises or is nostalgic about its subject-matter?

BB: The way that prostitution stood in relation to society a hundred years ago is not the same as it is today. Perhaps the film is romantic about the turn of the century. I could have set it in another time, but I chose 1900 because this is a really fascinating time – it's really the end of one world and the beginning of another one, for many reasons.

CW: The women's relationships with their clients are depicted as being quite tender.

BB: It's a very high-end house, very luxurious. And a lot of the men use it like a gentleman's club, with the difference of course that you have girls and rooms upstairs. It's a social place. At the time it was very important for artists to come here, have a drink, talk about life, politics, art – and sometimes they'd go up with a girl. It's true that you had a few men who had special relationships with particular girls. They wouldn't be with a different prostitute every night – it's more like a kind of relationship. And the girls would of course hope that eventually the men would pay off their debts and take them away – maybe not marry them, but buy them an apartment.

CW: Throughout the film, the girls talk about being 'rescued' by a client who will buy them from l'Apollonide's madam. We spend much of the film wondering if this will happen, and if so, who will be the chosen one...

BB: I wanted to keep this idea present, but out of focus. After a while it stops being the focus of the film, this notion of escape. And instead the focus becomes the imminent end of everything: of the century, of the house, of their lives together.

CW: We never actually see any sexual intercourse.

BB: No, for three reasons really. The first is that I've done that already, and I was getting a bit fed up of being labelled by it. The second is that I thought if you're setting a film in a brothel, the sex scenes would be so expected that it would be boring. There would be no tension. Even people who wanted to see sex scenes would be bored! So I decided to take advantage of all the time spent in the rooms between girls and clients to show something else. Something which is more theatrical, more about fetishism, but which is also true in a way. For example, the bath of champagne is based on a true story involving Edward VII – he came to Paris every ten days to visit a house called Le Chabanais. I believe these moments show something more authentic about the relationship between the clients and the girls than a straightforward sex scene would do.

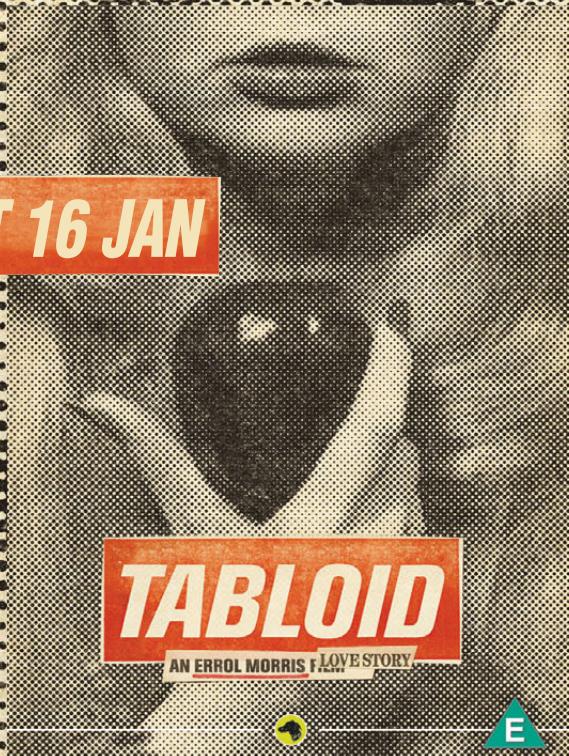
CW: Why did you choose to cast so many film directors in the film: among others, Jacques Nolot and Xavier Beauvois feature as clients, and Noémie Lvovsky as the brothel owner. Is this significant?

BB: The first one I cast – Noémie Lvovsky – I picked because I like her as an actress. She's a director, but she's a great, great actor. And so is Xavier Beauvois. But then I got to four or five, and in the end I think there were eight or nine directors in the film in total. Maybe it says something about watching and being watched!

■ 'House of Tolerance' is released on 27 January, and is reviewed on page 66

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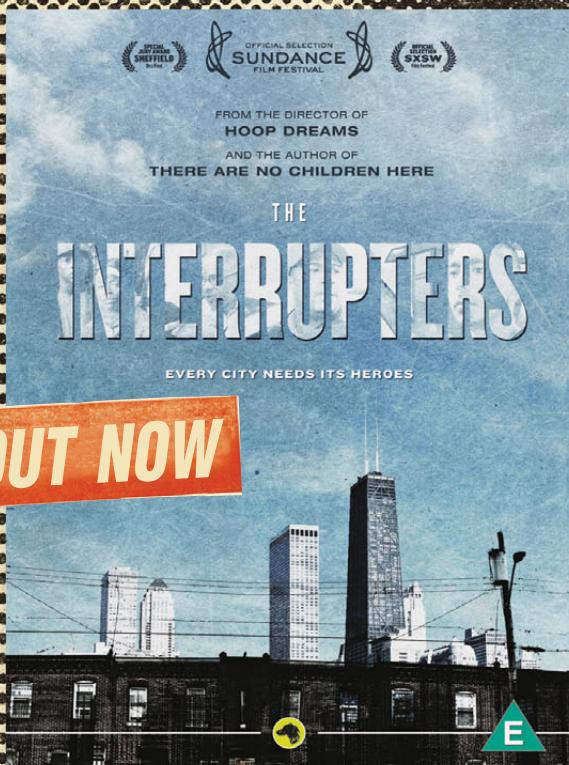


OUT NOW

THIS YEAR,
THE BIGGEST STORY
IS THEIR OWN

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INSIDE THE NEW YORK TIMES

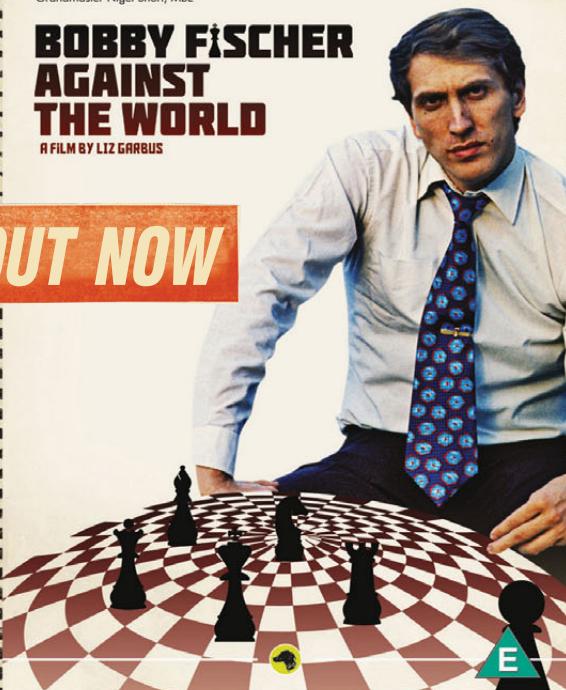


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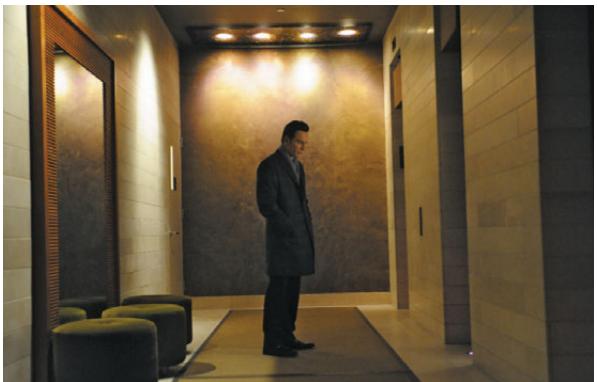
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A SINGLE MAN
In the new film by
Steve McQueen, opposite, Brandon
(Michael Fassbender, above) needs sex but
is uncomfortable with
intimacy, as on his
date with co-worker
Marianne (Nicole
Beharie, on right above)

Three years after 'Hunger' launched Steve McQueen and Michael Fassbender on the filmmaking scene, they're back with a film that's no less fearlessly controversial. **Nick James** talks to them about sex addiction and 'Shame'

SEX AND THE CITY

S

hame is the emotion we're meant to be feeling right now. The economic mess is somehow our own fault. While the super-rich sucked too much cash out of governmental systems through global tax evasion (and continue to do so), the rest of us Westerners consumed as if there was no tomorrow – and now there is no tomorrow. Name your poison – the one that caught you up in the consumer boom. Gadgets? Heels? Guitars? Cocaine? A huge DVD collection?

Perhaps you didn't have one. Perhaps you were an exemplary citizen who never bashed their credit card, who always did their best for the environment, who behaved like hardly anyone else in the Western system. I'm sure there are some who feel blameless, but for now such righteous types should hold their counsel. We're in a period of mourning for a greed that felt good while it lasted, even if its excesses now seem criminal. It's a moment, for instance, in which the film *The Iron Lady* will ask us to find human sympathy for Margaret Thatcher in her dotage – the leader whose government first deregulated the markets in order to give Britain a desperately needed edge over the rest of Europe, and who presided over the dismantling of Britain's manufacturing industries.

Human sympathy is one thing we can still afford. That's the supposition Steve McQueen's *Shame* makes. The film is concerned with the particular poison of Brandon, a seemingly ordinary office worker. Brandon is the embodiment of the cool young white corporate professional of the 21st century. He looks lean and hungry in a hoodie or a suit and has the kind of stripped-down male taste in fixtures and fittings that we know so well from IKEA catalogues. His apartment is a high-up glass cube, a prism of light falling on bare surfaces, often the bare surfaces of his own body – a comely figure, since he's played by Michael Fassbender, the actor whose simmering sexual presence in *Fish Tank* excited as much comment as did his intense embodiment of political conviction in *Hunger*.

Brandon, too, is a name to conjure with. It could have graced a modern-day rewrite of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Brand-on – the kind of man who could, say, have had the Nike symbol discreetly tattooed on his ankle in a tongue-in-cheek way, but is more branded in the allegorical sense by his addiction and his culpability. And Michael Fassbender, as he says in the accompanying interview (p.37), keeps the character close, thereby lending his own brand to the project – and that extends to him being on screen naked a lot (and impressively so). Because Brandon's poison, you see, is sex addiction.

You might think that now is not the time to elicit sympathy for someone who, in a cheap characterisation, gets a lot of sex, but *Shame* is out to convince you otherwise. As their interviews below testify, McQueen and Fassbender are passionate in their conviction that sex addiction is a serious malaise, one that can tell us a lot about the way we live now. And of course that's an idea that men in particular are likely to be sceptical about; we're touching here on the increasingly covert world of male nudging and sniggering. My opening joke to Michael Fassbender when we met was, "I admire your energy" – and indeed the stamina required for the amount of shagging and wanking Brandon ➤



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLAS GUERIN/GETTY CONTOUR

'For Brandon, to be intimate means he's lost control. That's classic sex-addict behaviour. Sex for them is having control'

► packs into his days is impressive. He flirts with women on the subway and – like any commitment-phobe – is always open to what Erica Jong back in the 1970s tagged “the zipless fuck”, though he’s never too blatant or sleazy about it in public. When he can’t get that, he gets in prostitutes, and in between times he’s constantly online looking at porn sites for extra whack-off stimulation.

What ruins his frantic equilibrium is the arrival of his sister Sissy, played by Carey Mulligan – a singer who needs somewhere to crash and has no money. Not much is said between them, but you immediately sense a weighty past. Sissy is needy, colourful, explosive, a club girl through and through – incarnated with convincing brilliance by Mulligan. Everything about her seeks the intimacy that Brandon shuns. Almost immediately she allows herself to be seduced by Brandon’s lecherous (but not sex-addicted) boss, thereby further spoiling the waiting-room feel he likes his home to suggest. But there is a true bond between the siblings, as is proved when Sissy sees him come into a club where she’s performing. She sings ‘New York, New York’ very slowly, only for him, and you can see that he feels it deeply.

There’s a strong sense that, unlike Sissy, Brandon is exactly the kind of live-light, keep-it-simple, hooked-up, know-your-preferences kind of person who could live and work in any major city in the world. And yet at the same time it’s not any major city: it’s New York, perhaps cinema’s favourite city, locus of so many great works of the screen that the inappropriate phrase ‘ground zero’ comes to mind. According to McQueen, it was the research into sex addicts who would agree to talk that brought him to New York (nobody in the UK would speak, apparently). But make no mistake, *Shame* is – despite McQueen’s protestations that he never wanted it to be so – a very New York film, not least in the sense that Brandon is a revival of that great Gotham cinematic cipher, the alienated loner, the existential antihero, the Schrader-man afloat in a city that floats by him.

Shame is like an alter ego to the other New York film of the moment, Kenneth Lonergan’s *Margaret*, an operatic Upper West Side tragicomedy that loves its pre-bust community of fractious talk (it was shot in 2005). When Brandon gazes at his laptop and manipulates himself, the last thing he’s thinking is, “Are you talking to me?” He avoids the sore-thumb signalling of a Travis Bickle, and his chameleon-like qualities are enhanced by Fassbender having such adaptive good looks himself. Has there ever been an actor who can suggest so many others just by small changes of lighting or gesture? Sometimes he resembles a younger Daniel Day-Lewis; at others there’s a touch of Ewan McGregor about him. And yes, in certain New York locales and atmospheres, you can see a fleeting ghost-flash of the young Bobby De Niro. But such loner figures as Bickle are perhaps too tied to the baby-boomer outlook on the world. If *Shame* marks the comeback of the ‘man standing alone’, but with added self-disgust, it’s perhaps because the feeling of isolation is no longer kept at bay by our fascination with new communication devices.

But mention of De Niro brings me to the difficult part of this article. In the interview with Steve McQueen that follows, I quoted a passing

admonition from the critic Jonathan Rosenbaum about what he calls *Shame*’s “sexist complacencies and brutalities”. This caused a retaliatory accusation from McQueen about race (see below) and *Taxi Driver*. The opinions stated there are Steve McQueen’s, not mine or those of this publication. And if we can put such accusations to one side for a moment, you cannot help but notice how often Scorsese’s New York crops up in the conversation. Is it the mirror into which *Shame* gazes?

Nick James: Where do you think the tipping point is between someone who is merely sexually promiscuous and somebody who is sexually addicted?

Steve McQueen: When I first heard about the idea of sex addiction, I laughed. It’s like being at a Christmas party when Mary or Jonathan is drunk and everyone says, “Oh, he’s a fantastic drunk, isn’t he?” But when you realise that for Mary or Jonathan to get through a day they have to drink two bottles of vodka, it ceases to be funny. It’s a similar thing with sexual addiction. When you find out that in order to get through a day, someone is on the internet for 20 hours a day or more looking at pornography or having to have a sexual activity at least ten times a day, it’s incredible.

NJ: There’s been criticism in the US about the film’s attitude to women. The critic Jonathan Rosenbaum refers to the film’s “sexist complacencies and brutalities”.

SMQ: He really did? Woah. OK, Brandon is a sex addict. He has problems with intimacy. So he has a view on what he wants from certain women, because he doesn’t want what certain [other] women want to offer him – which is a sense of intimacy, of love. For Brandon, to be intimate means he’s lost control. That’s classic sex-addict behaviour. Sex for them is having control. There are things that can facilitate that: pornography, prostitutes or women out for a one-night stand. But intimacy threatens Brandon, and his is a very sad existence.

He attempts intimacy with Marianne [the co-worker played by Nicole Beharie, with whom Brandon tries to go on a date]. I wanted people to see him trying to engage, to open up, but he’s really incapable of it. He can’t put a sexual act with Marianne into a relationship. Therefore, what we do is cut to [Brandon having sex with] this [hired] woman on the glass. Saying this movie is about sexism is like saying *Taxi Driver* is a racist movie. And I’m surprised people haven’t said *Taxi Driver* is a racist movie.

NJ: The BFI Classics book on ‘*Taxi Driver*’ goes into that issue in detail.

SMQ: But why did they make [the] Harvey Keitel [character] a white guy? People understand that, just as they have to understand that Brandon has this affliction. Of course people don’t really accept sexual addiction, because they think that it’s just people being promiscuous. It’s a similar situation with Billy Wilder when he was making *The Lost Weekend*. Back then, people were not looking at alcoholism, they were just thinking [drunks] were stupid. Alcohol addiction wasn’t [seen as] a real disease.

You see the situation with Brandon in the night-club and Sissy’s singing ‘New York, New York’ to him, and he’s heartbroken. He’s forced to sit down and listen. She’s performing and she can directly ➤

THE VISITOR
The arrival of his
sister, singer Sissy
(Carey Mulligan, below
right), unbalances
Brandon’s partying
New York lifestyle



AIMING FOR THE CUT

In 'Shame', Michael Fassbender finds himself pushed to the edge once again by director Steve McQueen, he tells Nick James

Nick James: How does a typical scene go when you're working with Steve McQueen?

Michael Fassbender: When it comes to the day when you're on the floor and it's happening, it's almost like picking up where we left off on *Hunger*. Those guys [Steve McQueen and DP Sean Bobbitt] are just so non-afraid. There are no safety rails. It's like, what's the worst that can happen? You can fall flat on your face. Steve pushes me into a room and he says, "You're going to die sometime. What the heck?"

NJ: Are there little bits of you that come into it because you're improvising?

MF: It's me just using myself. I didn't distance myself from Brandon. I wanted to keep him as close to me as possible, because I didn't want an out. I wanted him to be an everyday guy, relatable to all of us. Of course his actions are extreme and typical of a very specific personality group of people. I met one guy in particular who was suffering from this condition and I found it difficult getting an honest and unguarded response. That problem with intimacy was at the core of that guy and of my character: how he had such difficulty making an emotional investment in relationships, and with other people loading their emotions on to him. That's a place where this guy was not very comfortable – an unsafe zone.

NJ: So is that the tipping point between somebody who just has a very active sex life and somebody who is sexually addicted?

MF: The difference is that for somebody like Brandon, it's come to a certain point. I'm sure it's not all a terrible affliction. There are definitely moments of fun, and that's why it's such a powerful drug. But a pattern starts to create itself where you're aware that it's damaging and having a negative effect on relationships. The impulses are overriding the responsibilities in your life. That for me is addiction. I know a lot of guys are sitting there going, "Well, I'm not sure about this." Strangely enough it's the women that seem to be more accepting of it.

It's that whole thing of *Shame* as the title. Talking to people that suffer from the illness, shame comes immediately after ejaculation. You get your rocks off and the first thing that hits you is this disgust with yourself. Your body is making the decisions for you. When Brandon's in the office, things seem pretty normal. It's only when Sissy comes into his life that you realise just how much of a problem he's got, because she unravels this safe compartmentalisation of his addiction.

NJ: Do you think Brandon likes women?

MF: He does, yeah. His main problem is that he doesn't like himself. He's trying to connect with women, trying to relate to himself also through these very physical interactions. That's why I like



MAN ABOUT TOWN
As Brandon in 'Shame', Michael Fassbender's chiselled exterior conceals inner turmoil

him, because he's trying. It's not like he's just bulldozing his way through these sexual escapades and there's no conscience there. No, he realises that what he's doing is not healthy and he yearns for some form of intimacy. It's just that it's too frightening for him.

That's why that scene with Marianne is so important, especially the build-up where they're walking the street. I really wanted to show a child-like element to him – something that was quite honest and warm, with his defences down. Unfortunately this relationship that has some signs of healthiness to it doesn't work out. He gets to that point with Marianne on the bed and it's too dangerous for him to open up, because he's no longer in control.

NJ: You've said you want to continue your working relationship with Steve McQueen into future films. What's special about it?

The first thing my dad said was, 'Thank god your mum isn't here.' She'll watch it – but maybe I won't be in the room!

MF: The first thing that hit me when I met him was that there was so much humanity in him. He's very honest with himself and he looks at the world and it affects him in a very strong or peculiar way. He's very interested in how it affects other people and I just knew that I would learn a lot if I was around that. And then, when you're filming, anything goes.

Sean Bobbitt is as important in different ways. That relationship with the cameraman – the energy, the space, the angles – it's almost like a dance. I'd say to Sean, "I might go in a different direction this take." And he'd just throw the camera up on his shoulder and say, "Surprise me."

NJ: How did you feel when you saw 'Shame'?

MF: It made me feel self-conscious. It was quite something. I didn't really know what to do when the lights came up. I was standing there in an auditorium in front of how many thousand people that have just seen me in a lot of compromising positions. My dad was sitting behind me...

NJ: That must have been difficult

MF: It was difficult, but it was more of a relief because my mum was supposed to be there and the first thing my dad said was, "Thank god your mum isn't here." She'll watch it – but maybe I won't be in the room!

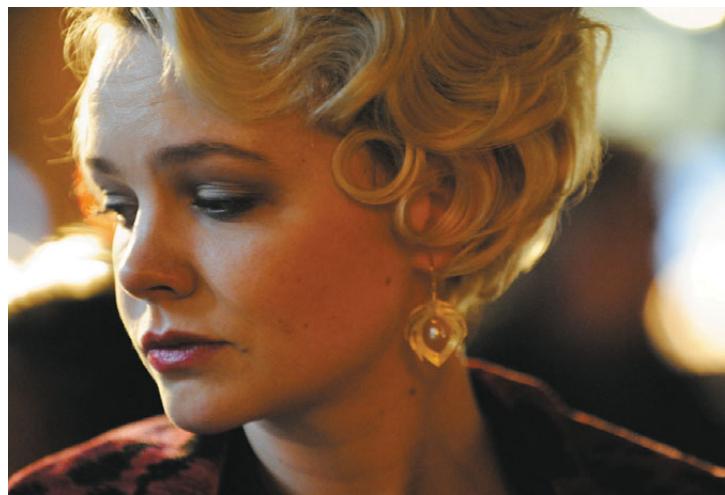
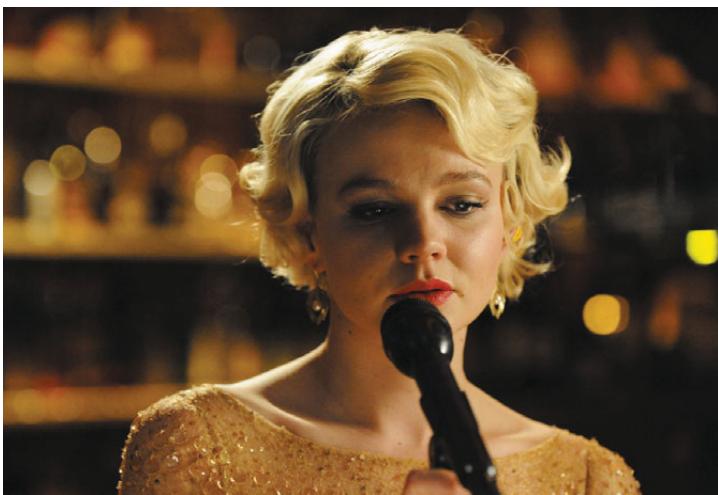
NJ: The scenes with Brandon's sister Sissy (Carey Mulligan) are rather different from the rest of the film, in that they're much more psychological.

MF: There's something about siblings that is always interesting, especially if they're of the opposite sex and there's not much of an age gap. They know each other almost better than their parents do, so there can be a real brutality in that relationship. As much as they know how to nurture each other, they can also go right to the place that hurts the most.

Brandon can't emotionally involve himself with anyone, yet Sissy throws it on the first person she meets. That's her way of connecting. There's also a history there that you bring into the film – and a familiarity with that history without needing to know specifics. Volumes are spoken in what they don't say.

NJ: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

MF: I've just got one sister. She's older than me and we're very close. My family is pretty tight, but I know from growing up that we went at it hammer and tongs at certain times. There's one little story that stuck out in my mind about my own cruelty towards her. She had a cut on her leg and we were at the seaside and I remember throwing sand and aiming for the cut. That viciousness – and why I wanted to reduce her to tears – has always stuck with me. Of course, I would do anything for her. And she did her own cruelty to me in a much more psychological way. Those things stay with you too.



IT'S UP TO YOU
In a key scene, Sissy (Carey Mulligan) sings 'New York, New York' in an attempt to communicate with her otherwise unreachable brother

◀ tell him how she feels. And she's telling him where they've come from, and where they would like to go. So in that huge room, with so many people, they have an intimacy which is absolutely amazing, where he actually opens up. This is not a monster, this is not a person who is sexist. This is a person who has a problem and in the film we look at that problem.

NJ: How did you decide on the song? 'New York, New York' is so well-known.

SMcQ: Brandon is imploding and Sissy has reacted to her past in an explosive way. So I liked the idea of her being a soul-jazz singer, because then she can express herself through her art. I didn't know the original song actually came from Scorsese's *New York, New York*. I thought it was a classic. Of course I saw it with Liza Minnelli performing it, but I never knew it was written for that movie. But if you read the lyrics of 'New York, New York', it's a blues. It's not up-tempo – it's not Sinatra swinging the microphone around. "These vagabond shoes are longing to stray": the person is homeless and he sees the bright lights in the distance. What's interesting about 'New York, New York' is that everyone has a relationship to that song. It's extraordinarily familiar. But when you turn it into something which is intimate, it makes it even stronger.

NJ: You like to work with long takes and scenes that play out sometimes in a single shot with the actors moving around in a choreographic way. How did that style develop?

SMcQ: I don't know. It's just finding things out. It's like walking into a room and all the lights have been switched off and I have to feel my way around and get the geography right. I'm tripping over, I'm bumping into things, but I'm finding out through touch, smell, other senses, what the layout of the room is.

NJ: You initially thought about making 'Shame' in the UK, but it was difficult to find research examples.

SMcQ: I wanted to do it here, but we couldn't get anyone to speak about [sex addiction]. The two experts in the field that myself and [screenwriter] Abi [Morgan] wanted to see were in New York. They introduced us to sex addicts. So I thought, "Why don't I just make the film in New York?" That was it. The wind carried us there. I never wanted to make a New York movie.

I just want to get back to this sexism thing. Of

the two women that Brandon is more intimate with, Sissy's damaged, but she's willing to talk – she's strong enough to talk about things, and of course Marianne is willing to take a chance. I would say that Marianne is the most healthy person in the film. Sissy of course is damaged, but she would desperately love to get better and she's doing it in the way that she's expressing herself. He's the one who's just closed.

NJ: To turn your earlier point about 'Taxi Driver' back on you, this film is nearly all about white folks.

SMcQ: Yes, it's all about white folks, but that's not a turning back. I'm not making a racist movie, or a sexist movie. The majority of my art films have black protagonists. So I'm free to do anything I can do. Rock 'n' roll, blues, classical, whatever. My next picture is going to be predominantly black people, and the one after. I grew up in a society where – fortunately, in Britain – I didn't live in a segregated area. So I make movies about whatever I want to make movies about.

This whole idea of sex addiction in New York, the people I was introduced to in the research were mainly... well, one was maybe half-Spanish, half-white American. My work is not deliberately made for white people. It's just about the research and the way it presented itself. People didn't want me to put Nicole Beharie [who is African-American] in the movie. You go to a lot of offices in New York and the majority of people will be white and that's it – that's the environment. The people I've been introduced to as sex addicts are 99.9 per cent white – let's just go with that. They didn't want me to work with Nicole Beharie and I said "Why?" And they said, "Because that wouldn't happen – that wouldn't exist." And I said, "What, I don't exist?"

Shame was the best thing I could do right now – I can't do any better right now. As an actor or as an artist, you know tomorrow you could get hit by a bus. When I'm working with an actor, it's as if it's the last performance they will ever do, and it's got to be there. If we're lucky enough to record that, then that's it. It's going to be the best thing that person can actually do.

You think of James Dean – what a legacy. Three movies – that's it. It's gotta be as if it's the last movie you're ever going to make.

■ 'Shame' is released on 13 January, and is reviewed on page 77

'Shame is the best thing I could do right now – I can't do any better. It's got to be the best. You could get hit by a bus tomorrow'



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*The sole full-length feature made by Jean Vigo, 'L'Atalante' was a bridge between the surrealism of 1920s French cinema and the poetic realism of the 1930s. **Graham Fuller** makes the case for its inclusion in S&S's forthcoming 'Greatest Films of All Time' poll*

ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD

Jean Vigo's great work about a pair of troubled newly-weds and the crusty old mate with the Hapsburg jaw and unfettered imagination who travels with them aboard the Normandy freight barge *L'Atalante* was based on a one-page scenario by Jean Guinée. This was the pen name of Roger de Guichen, who had been intrigued by the sight of a woman helming a barge on the Seine, and had named his fictional vessel after a frigate commanded by one of his ancestors in the Seven Years War. Following the banning of Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* in 1933, the director's supportive producer Jacques-Louis Nounez sent him Guinée's scenario hoping it would deter him from the kind of radical experimentation that had illuminated Vigo's scabrous 42-minute satire of boarding-school life.

"What the fuck do you want me to do with this? It's Sunday-school stuff," was Vigo's response when he read the scenario. It was workaday melodrama. Juliette, the young wife, bored with the monotony and domestic drudgery of her life on the barge after the initial erotic charge of her marriage has dwindled, runs away from her conservative husband Jean, the skipper, for an afternoon of window-shopping in Paris, only to find herself stranded when he angrily takes off in the barge. Her handbag is stolen, she's propositioned, she fears for her survival. The husband languishes, despite the kindly attempts of the mate, le père Jules, to rouse him. In Guinée's scenario, Juliette is found by the old salt in a church. Penitent, she returns to Jean, confirming she is faithful. But Guinée pessimistically concluded in his synopsis, "Happiness has fled the vessel."

Despite his reservations, Vigo sensed he could tell the story imaginatively. Nounez struck a deal whereby he would cover the running costs while Gaumont provided studio space, cameras and distribution. Vigo and his co-writer Albert Riera would eliminate Guinée's moralising, take advantage of the on-shore plight of Juliette (Dita Parlo) to show the inroads of the Depression and expose the spite of the *petit bourgeois* mob and the brutality of the police – and use music and magic to bring her home to Jean (Jean Dasté). The genie-like le père Jules (Michel Simon), who discovers her working in a *palais de chansons* instead of telling her rosary in a church, carries her out on his shoulder, as if she were one of the many cats that cling to him on the barge.

In October 1933, just before shooting, Vigo told a Belgian journalist that he was using Guinée's scenario "merely as a loose frame allowing me to work with images of the waterways, the environment of the canal-workers, and the actors". He was as good as his word. The connecting thread of *L'Atalante* is the realist footage depicting the harsh, unremitting lives of the crew and the waterfront folk as the barge heads to Paris and, minus Juliette, on to Le Havre. Contrasting with the voyage sequences, however, are exquisitely sensual flights into surrealism. Jean, believing an old wives' tale told him by Juliette in the first days of their marriage, dives into the icy river to seek a glimpse of her underwater, whereupon she is magically superimposed over him in her wedding dress as he swims. (Vigo drew on his 1931 short about a swimming champion, *Taris ou la Natation*.) Then Jean and Juliette, though miles apart, 'make love' by dreaming erotically of each other in parallel scenes, their bodies impressionistically speckled in unifying dots of shadow.

Only a few minutes have elapsed in *L'Atalante* when Vigo starts to infuse it with melancholy lyricism – and dab it with strangeness. The film begins with the funereal wedding procession at a timber village on the river, Juliette's mealy-mouthed relatives following bride and groom to the barge, on which he is to whisk her way from her provincial life. The gloomy sequence is alleviated only by the comic antics of le père Jules and the cabin boy (Louis Lefebvre), who nearly botch their welcome to Juliette; the bouquet they planned to give her having been knocked in the river, the boy materialises on the bank shrouded in old man's beard (a herb associated with virgins and the devil).

One of the wedding party observes that Juliette is "tired of village life", but Vigo shows her standing morosely on the shore, looking as if she regrets her decision. Once on board, swung there on the boom like a sack of potatoes, she is approached at the prow by Jean – the iconic shot echoed in *Titanic* – and melts on to the deck in his embrace, only to be disturbed by one of the cats, which ominously dislodges her bridal wreath and veil.

Vigo follows this with a sublime medium shot, scored to a Maurice Jaubert tune that poignantly signals Juliette's departure from her sheltered girlhood: annoyed with cats and husband, she tentatively walks the length of the barge, her satin wedding dress gleaming ghostly white against the fading day, the camera gently travelling with her as ➤



POLL COUNTDOWN

No. 7



HONEYMOON PERIOD
Newly married to Jean (Jean Dasté, right), Juliette (Dita Parlo) must share his cramped life on a barge with the larger-than-life père Jules (Michel Simon, above), before being led astray by a pedlar (Gilles Margaritis, left)





◀ another boat passes in the channel beyond. The shot picks up le père Jules at the wheel, but there's an unexpected cut to an eerily lit old woman who, standing on the riverbank with a toddler, crosses herself as she watches the bride, as if acknowledging what shame the night will bring. (In fact, when Juliette emerges from the hatch into sunlight the next morning, she's radiantly happy.)

Perhaps irritated by Juliette's show of independence, Jean hurries to catch up with her, but slips and falls on the curved cargo cover – a forecast of the mistakes he will make as a possessive husband. Two of the cats attack him, one leaving an ugly scratch on his left cheek. The sight of the blood mollifies and arouses Juliette, so she caresses Jean's face and they head to their cabin to make love for the first time. The cats were a personal touch – Vigo's memory of the pets beloved by his anarchist father, Miguel Almereyda, who died in prison in 1917 – probably murdered – when his son was 12. The two cats that attack Jean were tossed at him by Vigo and a fellow crew member. "More idiocy in the name of cinema," Simon wryly remarked in 1964, 30 years after the making of *L'Atalante*.

A greater idiocy than throwing cats or cutting one's hand for a movie, some might conclude, was the tubercular Vigo's killing himself in the name of cinema by filming *L'Atalante* in often freezing conditions. Just 29, he died from rheumatic septicemia on 5 October 1934, a few days after the movie – butchered by Gaumont and renamed *Le Chaland qui passe* ("The Passing Barge") after the chanteuse Lys Gauty's cloying hit song, which the studio crudely inserted – had been pulled from Paris's Colisée cinema following an unsuccessful two-week run. Vigo was always bound for an early grave – like Arthur Rimbaud, Alfred Jarry and Alain-Fournier – and, though he considered himself indestructible according to one friend, dying with his boots on at the peak of his powers wasn't the worst thing he could have done. Within 20 years, *L'Atalante*, his only full-length feature, *A propos de Nice* (1930), his sardonic anti-bourgeois travelogue pastiche, and *Zéro de conduite* had been acclaimed as visionary films. (*Taris* was his only other work.) Vigo thus emerged as cinema's unsailable *auteur maudit*, its greatest loss.

"All filmmakers are searching for Cinema and discover it partially," Henri Langlois wrote in 1956. "Vigo is Cinema incarnate in one man." *Nouvelle vague* directors – especially Truffaut and Godard – honoured Vigo in their own work, as have Lindsay

LIFE IS A DREAM

Jean Vigo – behind the marionettes with cinematographer Boris Kaufman in trilby, left – combines surrealism and naturalism in 'L'Atalante'

Anderson, Bertolucci, Oliveira, Carax and Kusturica. *L'Atalante* was listed tenth in *Sight & Sound*'s 1962 Greatest Films poll; in 1992, directors voted it fifth and critics sixth. Having ascended, it was absent from the 2002 poll. And in 2012...?

Enduring power

Michel Simon's quote about "idiocy" comes from an interview the veteran gave Jacques Rozier for the *Cinéastes de notre temps* television documentary that appears on Criterion's spiffy *The Complete Jean Vigo*, just released in America on DVD and (for the first time) Blu-ray; it also appeared on Artificial Eye's UK edition in 2004 and *L'intégrale Jean Vigo* in 2001. (Dasté, Parlo, Gilles Margaritis – who played *L'Atalante*'s singing pedlar – and other 'Vigo gang' members were also interviewed for Rozier's priceless film.) The fifth and definitive re-edit of *L'Atalante* – the 2001 restoration by the film historian Bernard Eisenschitz and Luce Vigo, the director's daughter – is now back in British cinemas seven years after it was released here to commemorate the centenary of Vigo's birth. And we haven't seen the last of it.

The film's enduring power has little to do with its commonplace story. Fêted by cineastes after World War II because of its proto-modernist style, *L'Atalante* is one of those rare films that transcends its time and place. The naturalistic performances are partially responsible for this: Vigo, by all accounts, was an innately sympathetic judge of actors who knew, for example, that he could get the best out of the difficult, depressive Simon by leaving him alone. The great actor, who had played the anarchic, bourgeois-rattling tramp in Jean Renoir's *Boudu sauvé des eaux* two years before, limp-lurches around, mumbles, grumbles, sulks,

sings, shimmies, does an impromptu Cossack dance and sticks a lit cigarette into his navel after he takes off his top to show Juliette his tattoos – but there is not a whisper of rhetoric in his miraculous turn; he is as naturalistic as Dasté and Parlo. All the performances are devoid of 1930s-style theatricality, except in the case of Margaritis's handsome, vaudevillian, nonsense-spewing huckster, who introduces a knowingly surrealistic carnival spirit; greeting Juliette and Jean at the dancehall where they spend their only night together ashore, he appears to break the fourth wall (as do Parlo and Dasté in the 'love-making' sequence). Replacing a smitten sailor in Guinée's scenario, his role is to tempt Juliette to Paris, city of sin – though what she finds when she gets there is not release and excitement, but danger and bourgeois materialism.

Blending documentary realism and surrealism, Vigo achieved an effortless-seeming poetry through Boris Kaufman's omniscient angled camera placement and gentle dollying and travelling shots, Louis Chavance's rhythmic editing – which he accomplished alone when Vigo fell ill – and Jaubert's lambent (sometimes languidly brassy) musical themes. The poetry also flows from visual rhymes and the use of natural or artificially enhanced atmospheric effects. In the first long shot of the barge, a cloud of steam from an unseen locomotive rises up in the foreground, echoing the station sequence that begins *Zéro de conduite*, and suffusing the scene in mystery. In one of the moodiest sequences, Juliette, forlornly contemplating the staleness of her new existence, gets lost on deck in the fog that shrouds the barge; one wonders if Vigo had seen F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927), an obvious analogue to *L'Atalante* with its warnings about urban corruption, or Josef von Sternberg's *The Docks of New York* (1928).

Juliette's dissatisfaction with her life grows when Jean – fearing urban enticements – shuts off a radio announcer describing the latest Paris fashions. When the barge arrives in the city, she steals into le père Jules's cabin, which he has crammed with the peculiar artefacts he has collected roving the world for over 40 years. They include a marionette (a Surrealist signifier) of a wild-looking orchestra conductor, a fan, a phallic tusk, a gramophone that won't play, a photo of le père Jules with two good-time girls, one of a smiling naked woman, and another of a brawny sailor baring his chest – a dead friend whose pickled hands le père Jules lovingly preserves in a jar. Echoing the

Fêted for its proto-modernism, it's one of those films that transcends its time and place



wonder of a moviegoer, the rapt Juliette, luminous in close-up, expresses childlike joy, fascination and shock as she explores with its owner this ramshackle *Kunstammer*.

In his 1928 novel *Nadja*, André Breton, the founder of Surrealism, records his trips to flea markets "on the lookout for these objects one cannot find anywhere else, outmoded, fragmented, unusable, almost incomprehensible, ultimately perverse in the way I appreciate it or like it". Similarly, le père Jules's objects have a surreally poetic resonance that mirror his unconscious (and polymorphous perversity) and carry Juliette into hers. "Surrealism," Breton wrote, aligning it with psychoanalysis, "aims quite simply at the total recovery of our psychic force by a means which is nothing other than the dizzying descent into ourselves, the systematic illumination of hidden places and the progressive darkening of other places, the perpetual excursion into the midst of foreign territory."

We remember the cat scratch on Jean's cheek during this sequence, when le père Jules calmly cuts his hand with a *navaja* in an act of bravado and Juliette sticks out her tongue spontaneously, as if to lap up the blood. One of Vigo's favourite films was *Un chien andalou* (1928), and it's possible he was paying a gentle homage to the sadistic eye-slitting scene in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's surrealist short; certainly, he recognised the taboo appeal of Simon's Beast for Parlo's Beauty, as if he were her concupiscent surrogate father. Both love Jean, but Vigo and cinematographer Kaufman (allegedly the brother of Soviet film pioneer Dziga Vertov) filmed the girl – hungry for sensual experience – and the old sailor – cured in it – so close together one can sense the coming together of their force fields. Unused to feminine attention after a lifetime of apparent ambisexual voluptuousness, le père Jules is moved by the tactile Juliette's presence, especially when she tells him his hair is pretty and combs it; she aspires unconsciously to what he represents – exotic pleasures, the release of the id, freedom beyond what she thinks even Paris, her mecca, can offer her.

Vigo may have originally intended a hint of predatory menace in le père Jules's excitation, however. When Jean bursts in and starts to smash Jules's crockery in a jealous, puritanical fit (unlike his wife and his mate, he is a repressed social conformist), Juliette reclines laughing on Jules's bunk and there's a cut to the old man pulling away

FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE

Vigo's depiction of Jean and Juliette's married life includes both rapturous intimacy and conflict, as the pedlar (in bowler hat) comes between them

from her. In one of the unused rushes, as demonstrated by Eisenschitz in the documentary *Les Voyages de "L'Atalante"*, Jules crawls above her as she squirms seductively on the bed, but a cat jumps in too early. Had the shot come off and been used, it might have cost Juliette and Jules's relationship its vital innocence. As Marina Warner has suggested in her BFI monograph on the film, "The theme of innocence relates *L'Atalante* closely to *Zéro de conduite*... Both make passionate statements about personal and emotional freedom and the expression of individual preferences and desires with an anarchic, antinomian *joie de vivre* which can also be found in some of the best self-declared Surrealist image-making."

A free association

"It was in the black mirror of anarchism that Surrealism first recognised itself, well before defining itself, when it was still only a free association among individuals rejecting the social and moral constraints of their day, spontaneously and in their entirety," Breton wrote in 1952. Vigo, given his history and his long effort to rehabilitate the memory of his father, was constitutionally committed to an anarchic-Surrealist cinema outraged by the plight of the poor – in *L'Atalante*, the unemployed outside the factory where Juliette tries to get work; the epileptic thief maltreated by the mob and the police; le père Jules and the other bargees bullied by the shipping boss – and in simultaneously documenting the liberation of the unconscious. His desire, he stated when presenting a screening of *A propos de Nice* in Paris in June 1930, was "to reveal the hidden reasons behind a gesture, to extract from the most mundane person caught off guard a hidden beauty or a caricature... and do this with such strength that from then onwards the world which before we had lived beside in a state of indifference offers itself to us in spite of itself, beyond its appearance."

In *L'Atalante*, the hidden beauty of Juliette and le père Jules is revealed through their awkward bonding, first in her cabin when she asks him to model a dress she is mending, then when they explore his 'cabinet of curiosities'. The immature Jean, having learned that jailing Juliette on the boat won't work, becomes beautiful too, through his

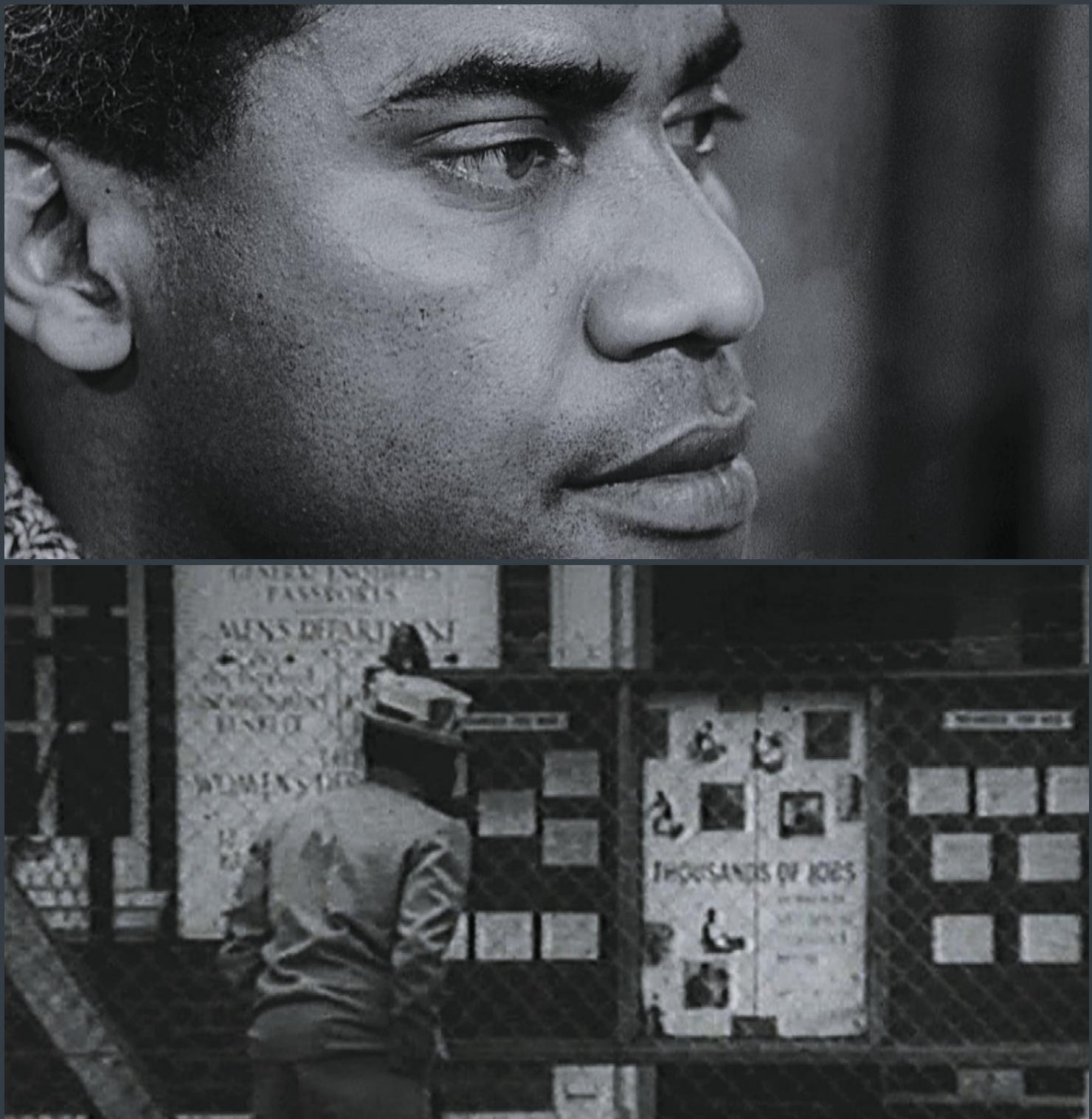
gradual awakening to the power of imagination, in his diving into the Seine and his erotic dream of Juliette. When the barge docks in Le Havre, he walks from the harbour to the beach and sets off running across the vast expanse of sand to gaze at the horizon, as if he would seek her at the ends of the earth – the dreamlike composition recalling some of Dalí's contemporaneous beach paintings.

Crucially, *L'Atalante* built a bridge between the 1920s Surrealist cinema of Man Ray, Germaine Dulac, Buñuel, Dalí and René Clair (who extended it in his stylised early sound films), and the poetic-realism cinema of the mid and late 1930s. Films like Jacques Feyder's *Le Grand Jeu* (1933), Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1937), Marcel Carné and Jacques Prévert's *Quai des brumes* (1938), *Hôtel du nord* (1938) and *Le Jour se lève* (1939), and Jean Grémillon's *Remorques* (1939) generally shared with *L'Atalante* a lyrical realism based on location shooting and blended with stylisation (or camera tricks), naturalistic acting and working-class or luckless heroes trapped by fate.

Vigo was kinder and more forgiving than the Surrealists, however, and less morbid than the poetic realists. Dudley Andrew contends in *Mists of Regret* (1995) that "the poetic realists for the most part were disappointed children of the bourgeoisie; their weak pessimism shows itself in the terminal fatigue that overcomes the hero of *Le Jour se lève*, a fatigue that shows up in the very title of Duvivier's *La Fin du jour* (1939). Vigo's people are never tired. Juliette, the purest of these, explores Paris with reckless curiosity... Vigo's tactile sensibility comes through in characters who subordinate order to adventure. The poetic realists scarcely relished adventure at all."

Included in the rushes Eisenschitz unveils in *Les Voyages de "L'Atalante"* (which is included as a supplement in all the *Complete Vigo* DVD sets), there are five hazy, haunting shots of Vigo taken between set-ups on location. He wears an overcoat and sometimes a large shapeless beret. In one shot, he looks pensively at the camera as he stands on the barge between the clapperboy and Parlo in the wedding dress. It compounds the young director's legend that he is beautiful, and that in the last shot he dissolves into a wall as he talks to the actress. He only had weeks to live, but the poetry of *L'Atalante* and the film's belief in the imagination of 'mundane' people linger on.

■ *'L'Atalante'* is rereleased on 20 January



ONE FROM THE HEART



INTO THE COLD

'The Nine Muses' mixes archive material about the black-British experience, opposite, with contemporary footage shot in Alaska, above

A densely woven film tapestry linking the black-British experience to 'The Odyssey', 'The Nine Muses' marks a spellbinding return to the cinema screen for 'Handsworth Songs' director John Akomfrah. He talks to Kieron Corless

First, a bit of backstory. The Black Audio Film Collective formed in 1982, comprising seven members. Throughout the 1980s and 90s they carved a space for themselves as arguably Britain's foremost visual and sonic innovators, in a range of documentary, gallery-based, video and essayistic modes exploring the Black-British experience in all its myriad formations. (Chris Marker is the most prominent of their legion of admirers.) *Handsworth Songs* (1986), an essay film made for and transmitted by Channel 4, is generally held to be their masterpiece, a political and poetically allusive exploration of the historical roots of Britain's post-imperial malaise, whose most visible manifesta-

tion was the wave of riots in 1980s Britain.

The collective disbanded in 1998. A few former members ultimately formed a smaller unit, the production company Smoking Dogs Films, and one of them, John Akomfrah, assumed the mantle of director. A range of acclaimed feature films, TV documentaries, gallery pieces and music promos followed. At the same time, the reputation of the BAFC continued to grow apace, fuelled in part by a touring retrospective in 2007 and a superb monograph, *The Ghosts of Songs*, produced the same year by FACT in Liverpool under the editorship of the Otolith Group's Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun.

Back to the present. The latest film by John Akomfrah, *The Nine Muses*, started life as a gallery film piece called *Mnemosyne*, which revisited

broadly the same area where *Handsworth Songs* was filmed, in a further act of haunting archival reclamation and historical recuperation. The gallery piece was then expanded, with completion money from the former UKFC, and renamed *The Nine Muses* – a layered, immersive, lyrical, densely woven feature-film tapestry that mixes fragments of archive with Greek myth, poetry, music, brooding ambient sounds and contemporary footage shot in Alaska and Liverpool.

As that description suggests, it's phenomenally rich and multifaceted: a profoundly moving lament and 'ghost song', a fractured dialogue between past and present, a complex sounding of the exilic imaginary. Easily one of the best of the much-vaunted recent crop of British films, it shows that Akomfrah and his collaborators are still right at the top of their game.

Kieron Corless: What was the impulse that drove you to make 'The Nine Muses'?

John Akomfrah: I felt there was unfinished business with *Handsworth Songs* that required us to go back into the archive. When we were in Birmingham for that film in the mid-80s, we came across all this stuff, but it didn't quite fit with what we were trying to do. For instance there was a guy in a film from 1964 – he's now in *The Nine Muses* – and he's clearly been asked what he thinks about race relations in this country. He says, "I love you, but the majority of you don't love we. We came here with pure heart for you."

It's always haunted me, that clip. Mainly because by the time I started making films with the BAFC, I don't think any of us would have spoken in that lover's discourse about this country – we were in a different phase of the cultural evolution of people of colour in the UK; we'd already moved to a place of disenchantment. So I always wanted to do something with this guy, and others. So the brief I put in to the Arts Council was that I needed to go back to Birmingham and look at the archive again from '48 to the 70s. And that's pretty much what we did. It took about six months and I must have watched I don't know how many thousands of hours.

KC: How would you characterise the imagery you were turning up in the archives?

JA: Most of it's through a social-problem prism. So the images of the migrants coming off the boat would usually be framed by, "Why the fuck are they coming? There are too many of them." So part of the job, really, was to see if we could help these images migrate from that world into another one where they start to speak for themselves. The question of migration is really critical. When you watch this stuff you can see all these multiple possibilities, and you can also see why the choices have been made to fix those images in the way they have been.

KC: So it's to some extent a process of releasing latent or hidden meanings in the images?

JA: It's one of the things I'm obsessed about with archives, because on the one hand they are repositories of official memory, but they're also phantoms of other kinds of memories that weren't taken up. A classic example for me is a piece with Alan Whicker, which is again in a film from 1959. There's a shipload of guys dressed to the nines in the bar, and the voiceover is along the lines of, "Look at these innocents." In the middle of it – you can read his lips – one says to the guy next him, "Look 'pon 'im" – ie "Look at that fucking idiot." ➤

That's it in a nutshell. He's insulting the BBC, but they never saw it – they didn't even realise this was possible. You can see they just thought, "Oh, there's a bunch of colonial migrants. We shoot and we go." In a microcosm that's what I love about the archive, and that's what holds you prisoner all the time – you're hoping there'll be those moments, explicitly acknowledging its Janus-faced nature.

KC: 'The Nine Muses' also has contemporary footage you've shot with solitary figures in different coloured coats in snowbound Alaskan landscapes. Why did you decide to include that?

JA: When we initially started to assemble the material, it just felt to me like it needed another layer, a counterpoint to the archive material – instinctively we thought we've got to speak from another place. The archive is tricky – it's opaque, all kinds of things are going on. How do you suggest that unless you place something else next to it? You can't.

It just so happened that we were going to try and do something with T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. I'd been fascinated by that poem for a while, but literally as we were embarking on it I thought, "Actually, it's the same project as *The Nine Muses*." Because the images we were trying to devise to speak about *The Waste Land* almost suggested in embryo the migrant experience. Normally when you meet people of my mother's generation, they pretty much say the same thing, either coded or overt – they will tell you when they came, where from, and that it was really, really cold. And the experience of coming over is usually described by them in solitary terms: "I came on a boat, and I was alone." They will also talk about how when they came to austerity Britain, they felt out of place, not colour-wise but in dress – it was grey, and there was me in my yellow suit.

KC: Could you talk about the myth of Mnemosyne (the title of your earlier gallery project) and this key framing device of 'The Nine Muses'?

JA: I knew we wanted something that suggested thematic chapters, and at the time I was reading Robert Graves's book on the Greek myths. It was a shocking realisation for me that the nine muses were all seen to be from this one figure, Mnemosyne, that gave birth to the arts. What that says in effect is that memory really is the fount of all the creative arts. The Greeks knew this 2000 years ago – I didn't.

I guess everyone who makes stuff works on that basis, but I didn't realise that there was this codified set of ideas linking memory and creative practice. It had to go in the film, because that's what it is – you're watching people and communities create themselves. So these creative acts of becoming could be broken up into chapters that somehow suggested they have some relationship to art or to classically understood art – the epic, the tragic, the song, etc. Once I'd got that, everything sort of fell into place.

KC: Then there's this other dimension in the film: the readings from canonical texts, the most central of which is 'The Odyssey'.

JA: It still felt like the film needed some kind of narrative strand or spine that suggested linearity, however fractured, and 'The Odyssey' offers that – but a particular reading of it. Because the other thing you hear when you speak to the older gener-



You commit to a process of improvisation and you arrive where you arrive'

ation, they say – sometimes jokingly, sometimes not – "We thought we were coming to the mother country." At the time, up until the late 60s, most people were formally not just theoretically British – they were part of British territory. So they weren't coming to a foreign country, they were moving from the periphery to the centre.

This is kind of the story of Telemachus, protagonist of 'The Odyssey' – it's how 'The Odyssey' starts. Telemachus goes in search of his father, and through that device you learn something about that territory – the ancient world, as it were – and the nature of valour. In other words, the journey of Telemachus suggests the hyphen, how all hyphens come to be – how you go from one thing to a mix of things, you come from the colonies and you become black-British. It's a journey of the hyphen.

KC: The sound design of the film is incredibly complex and layered. At what point in the process do you start working with your sound designer Trevor Mathison?

JA: Literally with every piece of footage I would start a dialogue with Trevor pretty early. He's an extraordinary creative partner. He tends to work to fill the lower register of the sound palette, rumble and low, and as I listen to it I start to think of other material that might fill the top register of the sonic range. First and foremost what Trevor provides is the noise of the thing. I'm not really into music, but

OUT OF THE ARCHIVE
'Handsworth Songs', below, established the reputation of John Akomfrah, top, and the Black Audio Film Collective in the 1980s



I'm into noise in a big way, and everything that's in the piece is there because of its noise value – with the exception of two Arvo Pärt pieces that work pretty much as standard scores. Every piece of sound in the film is to suggest an interior to the images. That's first and foremost what I'm interested in. Trevor comes with a package – you have me and you have noise, what I call a kind of "fuck-off ambience". It says, "I'm in your face and I take no prisoners."

KC: You've talked often of your interest in improvisatory musical forms, especially Indian music and jazz, but how does that inflect how you make films?

JA: *The Nine Muses* may suggest a plan, but that plan was only there in outline, and then the process is one of arriving at the structure, finding the form of the piece. That in a nutshell is the improvisatory logic in music that I'm trying to formulate as a practice for the cinema we do. It's not something you move away from to arrive at something – it's the basis of the practice. Because if you're talking about marrying together all these disparate elements – be they archival, stuff shot, musics, composed pieces, ambient tracks, readings, fiction, non-fiction, this range – then the point is to be able to say to yourself, "Relax, let's just play with this stuff" – and I mean in the form as well as the emotions. Let's just see what they start to suggest to each other – it's that open-ended and that free.

KC: So we're back to 'becoming'. In that sense, the form mirrors the subject-matter, to an extent?

JA: There's nothing any of the constituent parts suggest that I didn't know in advance, but what I can't know until we try to make them work is what they might suggest in relation to each other. There's something almost perverse in the process. I'm fascinated by some of these collisions, like taking these Arvo Pärt liturgical pieces – which are all about transcendence and attempting to connect with something otherworldly – to try and speak about the most prosaic and banal of human truths, like "How do I find a fucking job?" That appeals to me. So there are these humorous and slightly perverse sides to it.

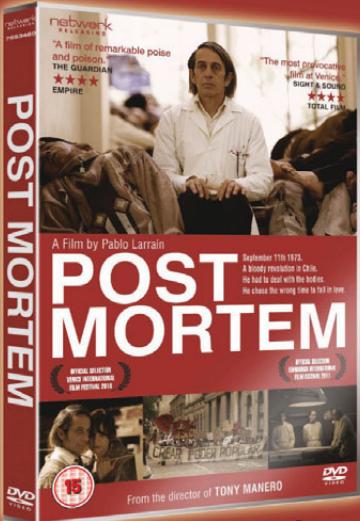
KC: It seems to me that 'The Nine Muses' is your most affective – and most beautiful – film to date.

JA: Without question. There are two films I've made that are beautiful – this one and *Testament* [1988] – because of their investment in the affective. I wanted to suggest with this piece the affective journey of the African diaspora in Britain, and get to a place where people might start to understand some of the emotional underpinnings of that journey. I've made lots of stuff about the political and cultural resonances of migration and exile and settlement, but this is the one that most felt like it needed to be from the heart, quite literally. I can't watch it without occasionally shedding a tear. But it's not literally what I set out to do. It's not an intended effect.

KC: That in itself is interesting in light of what you said about improvisation.

JA: You commit to a process of improvisation and you arrive where you arrive. This is what the journey seemed to suggest, and I would have been dishonest if I'd tried to engineer it otherwise.

■ 'The Nine Muses' is released on 20 January, and is reviewed on page 75

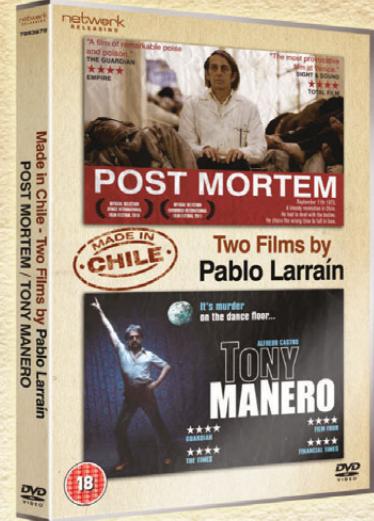


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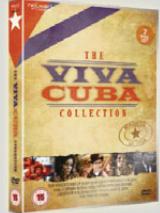
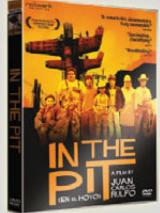
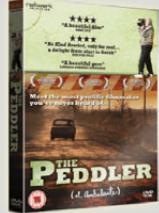
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*Sergei Eisenstein famously located the origins of cinema in the writing of Charles Dickens. But if that's the case, says **Matthew Sweet**, why is the great English novelist – whose 200th birthday falls this month – comparatively little filmed in modern times?*

CHARLIE'S GHOST



PICKWICK PICTURES
In the early days of cinema, the works of Dickens, left, were often filmed in one-reelers such as 'The Adventure at Westgate Seminary', above; more recent decades have seen the likes of 'The Muppet Christmas Carol', top

On a patch of Wiltshire woodland in 1844, Charles Dickens committed his second-best murder. The victim was a financier called Montague Tigg, the phony pharaoh at the top of a 19th-century pyramid scheme – a mutton-chopped Bernie Madoff. The 13th monthly shilling instalment of *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* printed all the bloody details: "The body of a murdered man. In one thick solitary spot, it lay among the last year's leaves of oak and beech, just as it had fallen headlong down. Sopping and soaking in among the leaves that formed its pillow; oozing down into the boggy ground, as if to cover itself from human sight; forcing its way between and through the curling leaves, as if those senseless things rejected and forswore it and were coiled up in abhorrence; went a dark, dark stain that dyed the whole summer night from earth to heaven."

We, who are so deep in film, find it hard to read such words without transubstantiating them into

cinema. In my head, the sequence begins with a descending crane shot of Montague Tigg's corpse, a broken body splayed on a catafalque of deciduous rot. Then the eye of the camera burrows in cell-deep for a Gaspard Noé-type fantastic voyage through leaf mulch and human meat. Finally, a swoop up skywards for something more Malickian and transcendental. A bloody moon, perhaps, rising over Victorian Swindon.

And why would I resist such an urge, when half a century of film studies has naturalised the affinity between Dickens and the movies? This year, as the world celebrates what would have been the author's 200th birthday, the connection has become axiomatic, inescapable. Grahame Smith's *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (2003) insists that his works are "essentially cinematic". *The Cambridge Introduction to Charles Dickens* (2010) argues that some Dickens novels are "often more cinematic than their adaptations". The Barron's Booknotes primer on *David Copperfield* encourages American high-school students to see that "Dickens instinctively used cinematic techniques,

Dickens on film



DICKENS AND SON
From top: 'Great Expectations', as filmed by David Lean and Alfonso Cuarón; 'Oliver Twist', as filmed by David Lean and Roman Polanski. Opposite, 'Little Dorrit'

though movies hadn't been invented in his time." On BBC Four this month, the makers of *Arena* contend that "Dickens wrote the way a camera saw before film had ever been invented and he remains, to this day, the most cinematic of writers." It's a seductive argument, and one that has been made since at least 1912, when the women's page of the *Daily Mirror* suggested that Dickens was more suited to the "film play" than the stage play because "the interest lies not so much in what the various characters say as what they do."

But if this is so, how do we explain the scant interest the medium has shown in all but a handful of his works? Big-screen adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*, *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *A Tale of Two Cities* have been produced in respectable quantities – an enterprise that has relied upon the labour of a diverse workforce: Martita Hunt, Gwyneth Paltrow, Charlie Hunnam, Roman Polanski, Rizzo the Rat. In the last 20 years, however, the work of Jane Austen and the Brontës has been mined much more thoroughly and energetically by filmmakers. *David Copperfield* hasn't ventured into an Odeon since 1935; Mr Pickwick was last spotted there in 1951. *Little Dorrit* enjoyed her only English-language sound-era cinema outing in 1988. *Our Mutual Friend*, *Bleak House* and *Barnaby Rudge* haven't been made into motion pictures since Jolson sang, and a fresh version of *Martin Chuzzlewit* was last projected in a movie theatre in 1914, when Travers Vale directed one for the Biograph company. The film has not survived, but the surviving documentation suggests that the murder of Montague Tigg was cut. Perhaps Vale – who started life in Liverpool as Solomon Flohm – detected something unpalatably anti-Semitic in the slaying. Or perhaps he didn't consider it sufficiently cinematic.

Here's a seemingly perverse fact about the relationship between Dickens and the pictures. The author of 15 long and teeming populous novels was at his most adapted before the multi-reel feature film became the established way of telling a screen story. Dickens was a bigger star of what's become known as the 'cinema of attractions' – that way of presenting movies as a bill of disparate short subjects – than he has been in the era of the two-hour-long fiction feature. At the beginning of the 20th century, the punters who crowded into fairground tents were so familiar with Dickens that they were quite capable of watching a one-reel adaptation of a single scene or sequence from any of his books and providing the explanatory context themselves. They did not need to be told that *A Yorkshire School* (1910) would summon the horrors of Dotheboys Hall from *Nicholas Nickleby*, or that that *How Bella Was Won* (1911) would extract the love plot from *Our Mutual Friend*, or that *The Adventure at Westgate Seminary* (1913) would feature a turn from Mr Pickwick.

The audience of silent cinema was Dickens's audience – working-class, born under Victoria and not necessarily literate. His stories – familiar from stage adaptation, popular engravings and magic-lantern shows as much from the printed page – were part of the business of their lives. And perhaps, for them, cinema sometimes seemed too proscribed a medium to contain his work. One of the delights of special performances of Herbert

Wilcox's *The Only Way* (1926), a crowd-pleasing adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*, was that the film would yield, in its closing moments, to a live performance by its star. As Sidney Carton's tumbril halted on the screen, out upon the stage stepped the flesh-and-blood form of Sir John Martin-Harvey, to tell the audience in person about the far, far better thing that he does.

The 1920s and 30s were not kind to Dickens – English modernism and middle-class taste both turned against him. Virginia Woolf declared that she would not cross the street to dine with him; E.M. Forster pronounced him vulgar; Aldous Huxley diagnosed "the quality of Dickens's sentimentality" as "truly pathological". A correspondent on the letters page of the *Daily Express* agreed: "I think I am voicing the opinion of a great number of people when I say that Dickens is little read nowadays, except under compulsion... People who can find pleasure in reading the death of Little Nell display the same psychic qualities as those who stop and gape at a corpse on a city pavement." Dickens films of this period (with the exception of Henry Edwards's 1935 *Scrooge*, shot cheaply and quickly at Twickenham Studios) are mainly Hollywood ones and – like most 1930s US adaptations of British literary sources – resemble Jeanette MacDonald operettas with the songs taken out. If there were voices in this decade hailing Dickens as the greatest screenwriter before the screen age, then they must have done so very quietly.

Origin story

For British cinephiles, the relationship between Dickens and cinema was cemented in 1950, when *Sight & Sound* began a serialisation of Sergei Eisenstein's impassioned essay 'Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today', published in Russian six years previously. It is a canonical work of film theory – but it has also, I think, proved to be rather more useful than it is true. The essay is an origin story of sorts, in which Eisenstein detects the primordial elements of his own artform bubbling away inside a kitchen utensil described in the opening lines of *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), the third of Dickens's Christmas Books. "The kettle began it," Eisenstein repeats, identifying in this image the progenitor of the kind of shot upon which classical American cinema was founded. ("Certainly," Eisenstein asserts, "this kettle is a typical Griffith-esque close-up.")

For the next four issues, readers of this magazine mulled over Eisenstein's proposal of a direct genealogical relationship between the auteur of *Strike*, the 'Father of Film' and Boz. "From here, from Dickens, from the Victorian novel, stem the first shoots of American film aesthetic," he writes. "The genetic line of descent is quite consistent." D.W. Griffith filmed *The Cricket on the Hearth* in 1909. It does not begin with a close-up of a kettle, or anything else. Eisenstein, I strongly suspect, never saw it. But that scarcely matters – the principal function of 'Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today' is to assert the historical inevitability of Eisenstein's own techniques.

I'm a little suspicious, too, of a much-quoted anecdote about Griffith that Eisenstein brings to the party. He foraged it from *When the Movies Were Young* (1925), a somewhat self-serving account of



BFI STILLS, KOBAL COLLECTION (2)

early Hollywood by Linda Arvidson, Griffith's first wife and the lead of many of his earliest pictures. Arvidson recalled the arguments at Biograph during the shooting of *After Many Years* (1908), a one-reel drama about a woman who marries bigamously, under the mistaken belief that her sailor husband has drowned at sea. According to Arvidson, Griffith appalled his employers by proposing to cut from a shot of the heroine waiting for her husband's return to a shot of the hero cast away on a desert island. "How can you tell a story jumping about like that?" went the protest. "The people won't know what it's about." Griffith had his answer prepared. "Well," he replied, "doesn't Dickens write in that way?"

Arguably, he does. But so, more pertinently, does Alfred Lord Tennyson, the author of the poem from which *After Many Years* was adapted. In the space of a few lines, 'Enoch Arden' shifts its attention from the English coast to a distant island and back again – a quality that made it a natural and a favourite subject for the magic lantern. With the easing of a lever and the flip of a glass slide, showmen and amateur lanternists had been achieving comparable shifts of viewpoint for decades before Biograph was founded. This is not part of Eisenstein's story. "Griffith arrived at montage through the method of parallel action," he affirms, "and he was led to the idea of parallel action by – Dickens!" If the British director Pen Tennyson had not been killed in a military plane crash in 1941, perhaps he would have fired off a letter to *Sight & Sound* to claim some of the credit for his great grandfather.

By the time Eisenstein's essay was translated into English, however, British audiences had changed their minds about Dickens. His predilection for sentiment was still questioned (as it is, with boring regularity, today), but the war gave his work a new resonance. David Lean's screen adaptations of *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948) became opportunities for mid-20th-century British cinemagoers to issue a collective shudder at the past and look forward to a world cleansed of poverty, bad housing, dust, child cruelty, antimacassars and laissez-faire approaches to economics.

Rationing was still in force when, under the eye of Lean's camera, a thin, pale eight-year-old boy named John Howard Davies raised his gruel bowl and dared to request a second serving. That image of Davies in *Oliver Twist* spoke to mood of the moment – suggesting the sort of deprivation that post-war Britain was attempting to legislate out of existence. One scene called for Davies and his fellow child actors to look on enviously as the bigwigs of the workhouse devoured a great pile of pastries, hams and chicken. The gobsmacked expressions are genuine. None of these boys had ever seen food like it.

Lean's *Great Expectations* spoke with the same voice: away with the decayed carcass of Satis House, away with Pip's snobbery; in with emotional honesty and more equal distribution of pork pie. And what is Brian Desmond Hurst's *Scrooge* (1951) but a letter of congratulation to everyone who voted for the creation of the welfare state? War haunts these pictures as surely as Marley's ghost haunts Alastair Sim. (It's also,



Christine Edzard's stately two-part version of 'Little Dorrit' is extravagantly static and artificial

surely, the secret of the 2005 *Oliver Twist* made by that troubled child of war, Roman Polanski.)

The work of David Lean is supremely cinematic. At their weakest, his films are sometimes nothing more than that. But it's a term that doesn't fit too well with the most successful Dickens movies made since that flurry of post-war interest in his back catalogue. *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992) is unquestionably one of the great literary adaptations – anyone who remains unmoved by the sight of Michael Caine accepting the gift of Beaker's scarf is surely some species of psychopath. But is 'cinematic' the correct term for an enterprise in which the director must expend much of his energy averting the camera's gaze from the rods that are operating his cast?

Christine Edzard's stately two-part version of *Little Dorrit* is extravagantly static and artificial: when Derek Jacobi saunters through the garden of the Meagles family, he has entered an environment as theatrical as Munchkinland or the cellophane valley in Guy Maddin's *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. The more the 'essentially cinematic' nature of Dickens is asserted, the more confusing the notion of the 'cinematic' seems to become – and the more an explanation of his art seems to require the invocation of older forms of entertainment: the dramatic reading, the dissolving views of the magic lantern. The techniques of television – which, over the years, has expressed a more sustained interest in Dickens – may possess more genuine affinity with the images conjured in his fiction. Perhaps, like Eisenstein, we're inclined to see the cinematic in his work because, as cinephiles, we will always find the dead more virtuous if they appear to share our preoccupations.

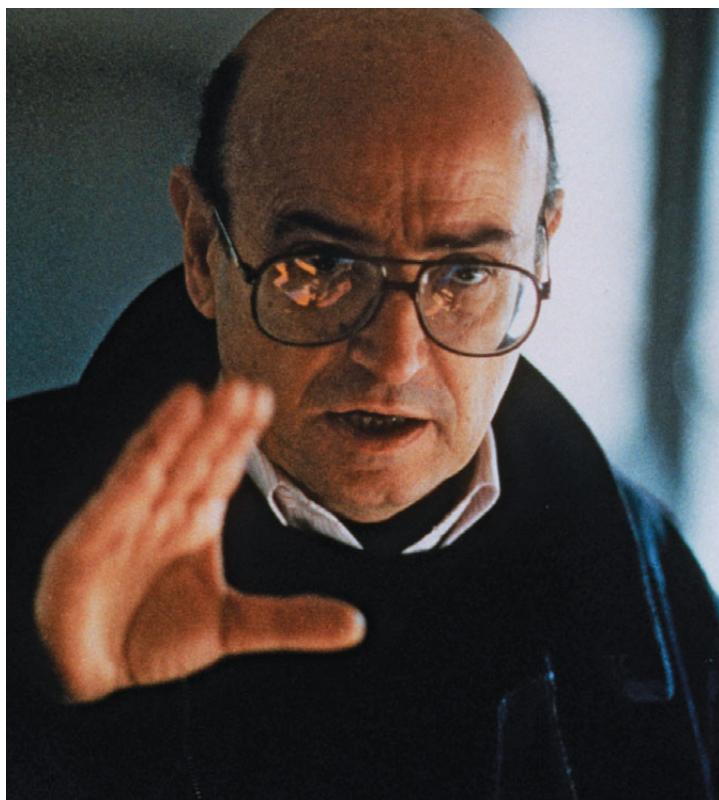
Let's return to the scene of the crime described at the top of this article – the Wiltshire woodland besmirched by the body of Montague Tigg. If you've made it to the bottom of this page, then you were probably kind enough to indulge my fantasy movie version of this moment from *Martin Chuzzlewit*, with its soaring camera and microscopic gaze. Indulge me a little further. Dickens wrote *Martin Chuzzlewit* after his return from America – an experience that left him crushed and disappointed. As he travelled across the country, he found himself strangely distracted by the trees he saw from his carriage window. "They were often as entertaining to me as so many glasses in a magic lantern," he wrote, "and never took their shapes at my bidding, but seemed to force themselves upon me, whether I would or no."

Now read the murder of Montague Tigg again, with this visual technology in mind: "Sopping and soaking in among the leaves that formed its pillow; oozing down into the boggy ground, as if to cover itself from human sight; forcing its way between and through the curling leaves, as if those senseless things rejected and forswore it and were coiled up in abhorrence; went a dark, dark stain that dyed the whole summer night from earth to heaven." I feel I can almost hear the click as the lanternist slips that blood-red filter into the machine. And something else, too – a human voice, speaking to me directly from 1844.

■ The season 'Dickens on Screen' plays at BFI Southbank, London, until the end of March. A selection of films in the season will tour cinemas across the UK throughout 2012. The 'Arena' special 'Dickens on Film' screens on BBC4 this month

*The features of Theo Angelopoulos have defined a contemplative style of European filmmaking that's as instantly recognisable as it has been influential. As the Greek director's complete back catalogue is issued on DVD, he talks to **David Jenkins***

THE SWEEP OF HISTORY



remember overhearing a joke at a film festival a few years ago. One man said to the other, "You know when you're watching a film by Theo Angelopoulos. As it starts, you check your watch and it says six o'clock. Three hours later, you check your watch again and it says five past six." Irreverent though it was, in retrospect there was a strange pertinency to his quip: Angelopoulos does indeed forge films where time – and indeed history – feel as if they have come to a glorious standstill.

His stock-in-trade is the immaculately choreographed sequence shot in which his camera lopes ominously and gracefully across landscapes, through rooms, shacks, courtyards, over and around huddled crowds of people who themselves produce artful formations as they mingle within the frame. His colossal geopolitical masterwork from 1975, *The Travelling Players* (*O thiassos*), offers just 80 separate shots during its four-hour running time. History, catastrophes, celebrations, political intrigues, social shifts are rarely recounted in the traditional linear sense – rather, they are daubed on to a vast and elaborate narrative fresco.

Does the aforementioned quip tell us any more about Angelopoulos and his cinema? Could it also suggest that he is perhaps no longer considered the great European visionary he once was? Or possibly that his grandiose mythical parables require such ➤



IN TRANSIT

The transportation of the Lenin statue in 'Ulysses' Gaze', above, directed by Theo Angelopoulos, facing page, photographed in 1995; below, 'Eternity and a Day'



Theo Angelopoulos



GREEK CHORUS

From top: 'The Weeping Meadow', 'The Travelling Players', 'Days of '36', 'Reconstruction'; opposite, 'Landscape in the Mist'

concentration, willingness and openness from their audience that they could never be consumed as simple entertainment. In a 2006 review of *Eternity and a Day* (*Mia eoniotita ke mia mera*) in *The Village Voice*, critic Michael Atkinson shrewdly compared Angelopoulos's trail-blazing innovations of cinematic syntax to those of Thomas Pynchon in the field of literature: work to marvel at rather than relish. The Greek director remains an icon of the so-called Slow Cinema movement – a feared enclave that includes Andrei Tarkovsky, Miklós Jancsó, Béla Tarr, Chantal Akerman and Hou Hsiao-Hsien among its most esteemed devotees. On a giant platter of 'cultural vegetables', Angelopoulos's films would undoubtedly be seen by most people as the brussels sprouts.

The 1990s were when Angelopoulos was at the peak of his considerable powers. The intoxicating but much mocked *Ulysses' Gaze* (*To vlemma tou Odyssea*) was awarded a Special Jury Prize at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, but much to Angelopoulos's public chagrin, it was pipped at the post for the Palme d'Or by another tale of moral and geographical decomposition in the Balkans – Emir Kusturica's *Underground*. Three years later, Angelopoulos nabbed the Palme with *Eternity and a Day*, a typically multifaceted and elegiac exploration of a terminally ill poet (Bruno Ganz) who chooses to embark on an ad hoc journey across Greece – and achieves spiritual enlightenment via an encounter with an Albanian orphan.

Angelopoulos is often cited as the auteur's auteur, the justification being that you can enter any one of his 13 features at any juncture and his vehemently languid style – weather-beaten yet ornate, primitive yet profound, bombastic yet intimate, real yet surreal – will be instantly recognisable. This theory can now be put to the test, as every one of his films is receiving a UK release on DVD – from his remarkably assured monochrome feature debut *Reconstruction* (*Anaparastasi*, 1970) right through to his most recent feature *The Dust of Time* (*I skoni tou hronou*, 2008), which has never been released theatrically in the UK.

Speaking to the 76-year-old Angelopoulos over the phone from his production office in Athens, I am impressed that all his films remain indelibly etched on his memory, even though he insists he never re-watches them once they have been completed. I ask him about the first shot of his first film, *Reconstruction* – a rural *policier* that doubles as a lamentation on Greek cultural decline (one could see it as the mirror opposite to a film like Elia Kazan's melodramatic 1963 emigration saga *America, America*). It's a long take of a bus pulling up on a muddy road next to a hillside village. Some people get off the bus and start trudging up the hill. I wonder if he realised that even with that first shot, he was breaking new stylistic and intellectual ground? "When you start making films, you're acutely aware of convention," he says. "Though personally I find that you don't choose the method in which you make a film. You are the one who is chosen."

"For the first sequence shot in *Reconstruction*, I remember the cameraman asking me how long the take needed to be," he continues. "As the camera rolled, I closed my eyes. I listened to the sounds being made by the actors. I could hear their

breathing and their footsteps. When it sounded right I said, 'Stop.' And it was perfect. The timing of these shots is not something I choose. These shots are not protracted in any way. Each shot is simply as long as it needs to be. It's more of an instinct rather than a choice. When I devise these shots, I have to choose whether I give in to the things I see with my own eyes. Then I must decide if it's worth intervening with the landscape in some way to fit with my initial dream."

Angelopoulos has been likened to a kind of orchestral conductor more than a conventional film director – a suggestion he resists. "I'd describe myself as a translator," he says. "A translator of a sound, a feeling and a time that comes from far away. When it comes to me, I have no choice but to absorb it."

The characters in an Angelopoulos film are nearly always on the move. Their journeys and their interactions with landscape and the displaced flotsam and jetsam of the roadside are central to what his films are about. Look at Marcello Mastroianni's crestfallen turn in *The Beekeeper* (*O melissokomos*, 1986), as he crystallises his dislocation from the younger generation while transporting a cargo of bees across the country for the spring. Or look at the pre-teen brother and sister on a paradoxical search for a mythical father figure in the extraordinary *Landscape in the Mist* (*Topio stin omichli*, 1988).

"The only place I really feel at home is in a car next to a driver," the director admits. "I don't drive myself, but I find the simple act of passing through landscapes very moving. The way I look at the world on my various travels is what essentially defines my filmmaking." And what of the village in *Reconstruction*? Did his damning prophecy of decline come true? "Recently I met with a female director and we visited the village in the northwest of Greece where *Reconstruction* was filmed. Back then, people were leaving and going to Germany to work. When I returned it was very different. The place had become more commercialised. Despite its problems, there used to be a poetic authenticity to the town and its people which is no longer there."

Systems of symbols

Angelopoulos has been heralded as one of the great chroniclers of 20th-century Greek history, though his ideas are never baldly stated, evolving instead through fragile systems of symbols and careful visual and aural juxtapositions. Made during the rule of the right-wing military junta, *The Travelling Players* was a film that forced Angelopoulos to think innovatively. "It's what we called 'the fear of intervention' – the fear that our artistic expression would be corrupted," he explains. "The threat of censorship makes filmmakers function in a completely different way. When I think about the film now, I feel *The Travelling Players* is a name that could also refer to the crew making the film. The technicians and the actors got in trouble with the police. A couple of them spent some time in prison. Even more important than the role of the director was the person we had as a lookout to make sure there were no military police in the area."

It was partly this "fear of intervention" that led

Angelopoulos to employ a symbolist mode of filmmaking. "The Travelling Players is probably not the obvious example, because half of it was filmed after the regime. It just meant that we filmed all the things that would have been censored or illegal after the regime had toppled," he says. The key film in this process, for him, was the earlier *Days of '36* (*I meres tou 36*, 1972), about the far-flung ramifications of a prison siege in which an incarcerated informant and assassin is held at gunpoint by a conservative politician.

"*Days of '36* refers to the Metaxas dictatorship of 1936 and was filmed during the dictatorship of the 1970s," he explains. "It was with this film that I had to change the way I spoke as a filmmaker. Everything became suggested or implied. When *Days of '36* was first shown in Athens, there were people in the audience who started asking questions. I was surprised when I realised that those people weren't the police. I remember one woman handed me some flowers and asked: had she really understood everything she had just seen? And of course I said yes. In the spirit of the film, even this dialogue with the audience was suggested and implied."

Part of the fascination of Angelopoulos's cinema is knowing that the spectacle you're watching was actually staged for the camera. Witnessing the giant statue of Lenin transported downriver in *Ulysses' Gaze* is as genuinely awe-inspiring as any celluloid chicanery by Spielberg or Lucas. Such set pieces are a glory to behold, recalling such silent showmen as Lang, Griffith or von Stroheim. (Incidentally, Angelopoulos admits to being very fond of Michel Hazanavicius's silent-cinema homage *The Artist*. "It piqued my memories," he says. "It was when I first saw the silent classics that I knew I wanted to make films myself.")

It's almost impossible to imagine money being made available to carry out such logistical feats for the camera today – particularly given Greece's ravaged economy. But Angelopoulos insists he will never be tempted to turn to computer-generated imagery as a means to an end. "If I choose to have a similar shot to the one in *Ulysses' Gaze* in my new film, it will be filmed in exactly the same way," he says. "I don't make films just to try and achieve something. It's the experience that counts – the process. It's about how the scene is formulated. It's giving birth to the image that matters to me." A 3D feature is clearly out of the question, then? He laughs: "It's not something that has been put forward to me. I'd say that my conception of what cinema is could not be married with this method."

Cycle of reprocessing

Angelopoulos's highly principled method of image making has clearly been an influence on many contemporary film directors. Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* boasts that Angelopoulos touch, as does Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte*. How does he feel when he sees a film that has clearly been informed by his style? "Every generation is influenced by the previous one," he concedes. "It's a cycle of reprocessing – of handing ideas down through time. If ever I see a film where there's a long sequence shot, or an idea I'd recognise from my own films, I just remember that I was influenced – possibly unconsciously – by the generation of filmmakers before



The characters are nearly always on the move. Their interactions with landscape and the displaced flotsam and jetsam of the roadside are central

me, and they would probably have had the same reaction if they were watching my films."

Despite an economy in tatters, Greek cinema is in fine fettle at the moment, with young, spiky talents in the form of Yorgos Lanthimos (*Dogtooth*) and Athina Rachel Tsangari (*Attenberg*) wowing (and occasionally scandalising) audiences worldwide. "I find these films very interesting indeed," says Angelopoulos. "There is a new generation of filmmakers in Greece. They've created a new language and they have something to say. It's very different to the so-called New Greek Cinema of the 70s, and it's good to see that after all these years there's another groundswell of creative activity."

While he's enthusiastic about Greece's cinema, he's less inclined to see hope in its political future. In an interview he gave around the time of 1991's *The Suspended Step of the Stork* (*To meteoro vima tou pelargou*) – arguably his most directly political work – he was quoted as saying that he'd always considered politics as a faith; now he saw it as a profession. "I'd say that notion is still relevant," he says now. "Serving people is a job, not an ideology." As stories of Greece's economic decline hog the front pages, I ask Angelopoulos if he feels his films have regained a political prescience.

"In a strange way I do," he admits. "But I do not for a moment think this is a good thing. Everything back then that looked like a series of bleak

possibilities for our future is now being confirmed. I come from a generation where we thought we were going to change the world. Back around 2000 was when it felt like the dream was over."

His next film, *The Other Sea*, is the closing chapter of a trilogy, and will be "based on the political realities of the now, both here in Greece and across Europe". The first film of the three, *The Weeping Meadow* (*To livadi pou dakryzei*, 2004) deals with the construction and maintenance of a riverside village in 1919. The second, *The Dust of Time*, is a creatively executed game of temporal hopscotch, in which a film director (played by Willem Dafoe) wrestles with his family history while searching Europe for his missing daughter. While these two films are set in the past, *The Other Sea* dwells on the present and the future.

"The end of *The Dust of Time* is also the end of a dream," Angelopoulos explains. "This new film is about the lack of a dream at the moment. I don't think the problems of the present are necessarily financial problems, but a general lack of values. This new film talks about a closed horizon. As a country, it's like we're all sitting in a closed waiting room, and we have no idea what's going to happen when that door is finally opened."

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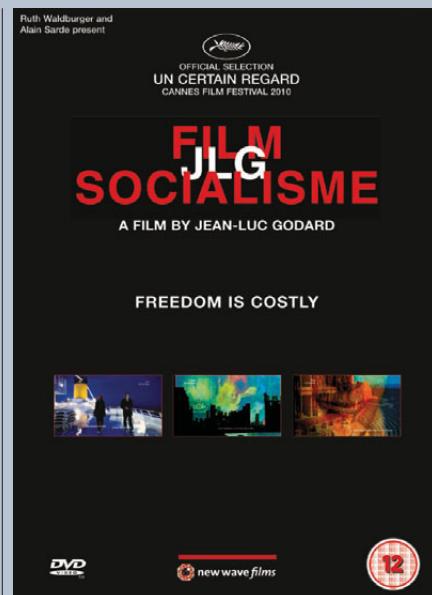
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.....
A lyrical, crafted depiction of one of America's most forlorn outposts, **Bombay Beach**'s patchwork of styles and images achieves variable results, though its characters have unquestionable raw charisma  **p61**
.....

Extended family

Alexander Payne's follow-up to 'About Schmidt' and 'Sideways' is a characteristic mix of funny and painful, with Hawaii lawyer George Clooney struggling with family baggage as his wife lies in a coma. By **Philip Kemp**

The Descendants

Alexander Payne, 2011

Ever since Matthew Broderick's scheming high-school teacher in *Election* (1999), at once attracted to and repelled by Reese Witherspoon's terrifyingly ambitious teenage politico, Alexander Payne has homed in on men in crisis – through Jack Nicholson's grumpy pensioner in *About Schmidt* (2002) to Paul Giamatti's depressive oenophile in *Sideways* (2004). They're invariably deeply flawed characters, and if we end up sympathising with them, it's only after we've been granted a good look at their more unlovable and often ludicrous aspects.

In *Election* Jim McAllister (Broderick) plots not only to defraud one of his pupils but to cheat on his wife; he ends up without wife, potential lover (they've ganged up on him) or job, and a face farcically swollen by a wasp sting. Likewise, newly retired Warren Schmidt (Nicholson) treats his wife with contempt ("Who is this old woman who lives in my house?"), only to be requited by having her drop dead on him, leaving him helplessly bereft and forced to realise – almost too late – that his whole life has been misdirected and misspent. Nearly the first thing we see Miles Raymond (Giamatti) do in *Sideways* is steal money from his mother; it might be cutely naughty in a teenager, but in a man in his forties it's just sad and sleazy. And his travelling companion, washed-up actor Jack (Thomas Haden Church), is no less juvenile in his approach to women. This being a Payne film, both end up humiliated before achieving some small degree of hard-won wisdom.

Matt King (George Clooney) – the workaholic Hawaiian lawyer at the heart of Payne's first feature in seven years, *The Descendants* – neatly fits the pattern. A self-confessed hands-off father ("I'm the back-up parent, the understudy"), Matt finds himself suddenly called on to engage with two daughters he scarcely knows while his wife Elizabeth lies unconscious in the



Shailene Woodley's Alexandra visibly gains maturity, morphing from resentful teenager to supportive figure in the face of her father's bewilderment

hospital on life support, the victim of a waterskiing accident. And while he's ineptly trying to fathom their differing emotional reactions to the situation, his elder daughter Alexandra (Shailene Woodley) lands him with a further whammy: his wife was having an affair and planned to divorce him.

Matt's response triggers a classic instance of Payne's knack for splicing pathos with comedy – or vice versa. Pausing only to grab the nearest pair of shoes (since we're in Hawaii, he's been wandering around the house barefoot), Matt dashes off to visit nearby friends who, he believes, will know the name of his wife's lover. But the footwear he picks up are plastic deck shoes, totally unsuited for speed, and his genuine distress is undercut by the absurdity of his lumbering, duck-legged run. (It also typifies Clooney's refreshing lack of personal vanity as an actor.) Even when he arrives at the house, desperate and sweaty, his urgent concerns

have to wait while his friends finish off an acrimonious argument.

This characteristically Paynean mix of painful and funny holds good for at least the first half of the film. In one of the film's edgiest scenes, Matt furiously harangues his wife as she lies on her hospital bed, accusing her of persistent hostility towards him: "The only thing I know for sure is that you're a goddamn liar." His guilt-ridden anger is heartfelt but at the same time farcical, vented as it is on a woman in a coma. Again, the confrontation with his short-fused father-in-law Scott (Robert Forster) crunches slapstick into grief in a messy emotional pile-up. Scott, his grey cropped head visibly rippling with aggression, accuses Matt of having pushed Elizabeth into danger-seeking pastimes through his emotional remoteness. The situation's defused – or perhaps deflected – by the presence of Alexandra's goofball sort-of boyfriend Sid (Nick Krause), who giggles at Elizabeth's dementia-afflicted mother Alice. Re-routing his anger, Scott punches Sid in the eye. "How often do old

people just haul off and cold-cock you like that?" inquires Sid in the car afterwards, sincerely bemused.

Sid's only there because Alexandra, retrieved by Matt from her boarding school – where he finds her out of bounds at night, stoned – insists she'll be "a lot more civil" if he's around. It's on the same rather thin pretext (since it's hard to believe Alexandra, intelligent and emotionally aware for all her teenage waywardness, would tolerate the company of this idiot for more than five minutes) that Sid accompanies her, Matt and younger daughter Scottie on the excursion that takes up most of the film's later stages. (As *About Schmidt* and *Sideways* indicate, Payne has a liking for variants of the road-movie genre.) Having identified his wife's lover as a realtor called Brian Speer (Matthew Lillard), Matt tracks him to a holiday cottage on Kaua'i, the northernmost of the Hawaiian islands.

While there, Matt has a late-night encounter with Sid that reveals the lad as a sensitive soul – which feels less like a plausible deepening of character than a finger-wagging 'don't judge' directed at the audience. But by this stage, in any case, the film has veered slightly off track. The stalking of Brian, involving much trudging up and down beaches and peering over hedges, goes on rather too long, and doesn't come back into focus until Matt's encounter with Brian's wife Julie (Judy Greer), sweetly unaware of the situation, and then his confrontation with Brian himself. Brian, it turns out, far from reciprocating Elizabeth's grand passion, regarded her as nothing more than a passing fling and had no intention of leaving his wife for her. Rather than have the cuckolded husband punch him out (the catharsis a less subtle filmmaker might have chosen) Payne has Matt, far more tellingly, treat Brian with pitying contempt.

Payne, whose early features were set in his native Omaha, has always shown an acute if unconventional sense of place. Traditionally, Hawaii's been used in films either as a frangipani-swathed tourist mecca (*Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Blue Hawaii*) or as the backdrop to





IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Stroppy teenage daughter Alexandra (Shailene Woodley, above) and boyfriend Sid (Nick Krause, opposite right) are just two of the factors Matt (George Clooney) has to cope with as his family unravels

the attack on Pearl Harbor. *The Descendants* signals from the outset that it's aiming beyond the clichés with Matt's disenchanted voiceover: "My friends think that just because we live in Hawaii, we live in paradise. Like a permanent vacation – we're all out here sipping Mai Tais, shaking our hips and catching waves. Are they insane? Do they think we're immune to life? How can they possibly think our families are less screwed-up, our heartaches less painful? I haven't been on a surfboard for 15 years. Paradise can go fuck itself." Even so, Payne isn't above splurging on the island's natural beauty when showing us the acres of unspoiled land that Matt's family have inherited and must now sell off; nor is he beyond exploiting the tackier elements of the local tourist trade to ironic effect. A grass-skirted hula-dancer doll, quivering on the dashboard of a hire car, gets its own close-up.

The Descendants – adapted from a novel by Hawaiian writer Kaui Hart Hemmings – is the first of Payne's

features where he hasn't shared scripting duties with his regular writing partner Jim Taylor (who on this film takes the role of producer). His co-writers here are Nat Faxon and Jim Rash, best known as actors at the Groundlings Theatre, and it may be their relative inexperience in screenwriting that's led to something of a weakening in the second half. Even so, the film plays to Payne's strengths – not just the emotional complexity and the constantly shifting kaleidoscope of moods, but his skill at eliciting in-depth performances from his cast. Shailene Woodley's Alexandra visibly gains maturity, morphing from resentful teenager to supportive figure in the face of her father's bewilderment; Beau Bridges, as one of Matt's countless cousins, is all avarice and affability; and Judy Greer turns her few brief scenes as Brian's cheated-on wife into a moving portrayal of undeservedly broken trust. And the film ends on a note of tantalising ambiguity: is Matt's decision not to sell the ancestral terrain purely motivated by an exalted sense of "belonging to the land" – or is he also recalling, with secret satisfaction, that it'll deprive Brian of a massive fee?

For credits and synopsis, see page 63

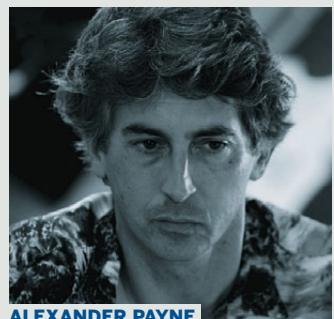
When the rug's pulled out

Alexander Payne on the comedy of the middle-aged guy

Earlier today a journalist pointed out to me: "Your characters seem to be middle-aged men who have reached a certain point in life and then have the rug pulled out from under them and have to come face to face with some essence inside of them and have to try and grow or die." That might be true. I've kind of tried to resist any pigeonholing of the characters in my films; everyone's different, but I think that one rang true.

Then I began to consider: "Is there something in me that makes me attracted to that? Do I want to show whom I fear being?" Actually I think it's just a comic archetype, as I make comedies. Chaplin had the tramp, Buster Keaton had the stone face. I have the middle-aged guy who has the rug pulled from under him and then has to do something about it.

The novel ['The Descendants' by Kaui Hart Hemmings] appealed to me because it's an emotional story unfolding in an exotic locale. It's a story that perhaps could be told anywhere, but what made the book for me was its unique setting among the landed upper classes in Hawaii. This is a region we never see in films. There's a whole distinctive social fabric to life in Hawaii – and



ALEXANDER PAYNE

that intrigued me. I love films with a specific sense of place. I started making movies in Omaha, then I went to Santa Barbara and now I have ended up in Hawaii.

When it comes to film, I'm absolutely a perfectionist. Not that I think I can achieve perfection, but I seek to be a disciplined filmmaker and put my all into each film. I also want the best of my collaborators. I tell actors: "I want your best performance – the best performance of your life, including after this film. From this point on, I want the rest of your career to go downhill." Unless I work with them again. Then I want the next film they do with me to be the best again.

Acts of Godfrey

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Johnny Daukes

Acts of Godfrey is execrable but you can't ignore its ambition. British writer-director Johnny Daukes makes his debut with a comedy about free will – told entirely in rhyming couplets – in which God (coyly known as Godfrey) demonstrates his control of human destiny by meddling in the affairs of Vic Timms, an unfortunate salesman on a grim motivational course at an English country hotel. Godfrey's schemes go awry, and Vic is left more miserable than ever. The audience likewise.

With tortuous dialogue and Godfrey's incessant commentary, it's a ceaselessly gabby movie. Whereas Sally Potter used rhyming couplets with restrained grace in *Yes* (2004), Daukes can't control their unwieldy demands. The lack of linguistic sparkle is dismaying – there's not even a playful rhyme for Godfrey. Couplet after couplet drops like an Acme anvil, a relentless clang of trite rhymes, convoluted syntax and inescapable bathos. For example: "I'm Jacqui from Romford, I don't mess about/I sell Spanish villas to villains with clout." Or, spat by Harry Enfield's coman to potential victims: "Shut up, you crumpling pillars of talcum/I was after your money and my name's Malcolm."

The film's airlessness derives not only from the wall-to-wall verse but also from the omnipotent deity, who begins by declaring: "You're all cards in a game I control." Simon Callow, mugging gamely to the camera, lends his plummy-chummy presence as God/Godfrey, taking on the guise of various members of hotel staff, from supercilious commissionaire to doddery barman, as he engineers both Malcolm's comeuppance and a romance between Vic and the sneeringly ambitious Mary (Myfanwy Waring).

Daukes occasionally lifts the script, either by ramping up the artifice (with a Busby Berkeley-on-MTV number for Mary, proclaiming herself "a girl who can't say no") or exploiting the contrast between formal verse and Iain Robertson's downbeat performance as Vic. Maggot-pallid, like a suet pudding left in the rain, he is well cast as a man whose life appears to have brought only humiliation but



Heaven help us: Simon Callow

who nonetheless attempts to do the decent thing. Vic is the only person on the course who clings to his scruples – even the dowdy Gita, who works in a funeral home in Devon ("The last stop between retirement and heaven"), becomes unwilling accomplice to the villainous Malcolm.

A twisted plot draws its diverse characters together through hidden crimes and long-burning resentment. Daukes sports with the idea of free will in a semi-comic riff on *Paradise Lost*, and theological parallels are evident – God's factotum, leading the motivational course, is called Brad Angel, while Malcolm is equated with Satan himself. Despite willing performances by a seasoned cast, the film settles in the circle of hell reserved for wholly misconceived film scripts.

• David Jays

CREDITS

Produced by

Tony Schlesinger

Written by

Johnny Daukes

Director of Photography

Stuart Graham

Editor

Gary Dollner

Production Designer

Michael Mulligan

Composer

Johnny Daukes

Production Sound Mixer

Clive Copland

Costume Designer

Jacky Levy

©Acts of Godfrey Limited

Production Companies

Tony Schlesinger presents a Johnny Daukes film

CAST

Simon Callow

Godfrey

Harry Enfield

Malcolm

Iain Robertson

Vic Timms

Myfanwy Waring

Mary MacDalen

Celia Imrie

Helen McGann

Jay Simpson

Phil

Ian Burfield

Terry

Doon Mackichan

Jacqui

Michael Wildman

Jamie

Shobu Kapoor

Gita

Demetri Goritsas

Brad Angel

Visual Effects and Animation

Rhythm & Hues Studios

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Executive Producers

Karen Rosenfelt

Arnon Milchan

Neil Machlis

Steve Waterman

Production Companies

Fox 2000 Pictures and

Regency Enterprises

present

A Bagdasarian

Company production

A Mike Mitchell film

Made in association

with Dune

Entertainment

Filmed with the

assistance of Hawaii

production tax credits

Executive Producers

Karen Rosenfelt

Arnon Milchan

Neil Machlis

Steve Waterman

Production Companies

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Karen Rosenfelt

Arnon Milchan

Neil Machlis

The Big Year

USA 2011

Director: David Frankel
Certificate PG 99m 56s

At one point in *The Big Year*, a British bird-watcher harrumphs that "only Americans could turn birding into a competition". Champion 'birder' Kenny Bostick (Owen Wilson) flips him the proverbial for this, but the stereotypical comedy Brit is right on the money. Any layperson's notions about bird-watching as an art of patient contemplation are swiftly dispelled: Kenny and his rivals, competing to see who can spot the greatest number of rare birds in the titular Big Year contest, out-travel even the American golden plover, whose epic migration makes it the favourite of sad-case narrator Brad Harris (Jack Black). Victory goes to those with the wherewithal to take a year off and buy air tickets on a whim, giving corporate titan Stu Preissler (Steve Martin) cause to be optimistic.

The question of whether the aviation industry is a great boon to avian life is lost in the slipstream: the thrill is very much in the chase, and there isn't much wondering at nature on either side of the camera. The closest we get is when the three protagonists see the bald eagle's extraordinary 'freefall' mating technique, but the gag – Kenny and Stu being reminded of their wives – denies the birds their difference from humans, as well as ringing false. Quite unlike the eagles, descending with talons locked, Kenny abandons his wife Jessica (Rosamund Pike) in bed after he sees over her shoulder a news report involving birds – another soft gag, since the news is of a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico, bringing with it feathered 'fallout' – and the real punchline, that the bird-watchers are indifferent to the loss of human life, is pulled.

Kenny is meant to be the bad guy, the wrong kind of obsessive, whose neglect of Jessica while she's undergoing fertility treatment eventually puts him beyond sympathy; but then he's also the only major character whose home life isn't drowning in schmaltz. Brad's father is rightly sceptical about his son's expensive hobby, but his mother is endlessly indulgent, as is Stu's saintly, undemanding wife: neither woman has any function in the film other than to forgive or encourage her grown-up boy. Stu's real obsession has been his career, and the life lesson he takes from his big year – Brad explains in voiceover,

in case it eluded anyone – is that relationships matter more than money. Brad himself learns the importance of having a sweet and really pretty girlfriend who also likes bird-watching.

As for Kenny, "Only he knows the price he paid to be the greatest birder in the world," says Brad – nonsensically, since we know what happens to his marriage. What we don't have access to is his obsession, its causes, its marrow. While a couple of Wilson's scenes with Pike approach drama, even these have a stock light-comedy subplot to resolve – Kenny is worried that she's carrying on with the decorator – and the dominant tone is cloying and complacent. *The Big Year* has a strikingly impressive cast, perhaps attracted by a script that sort of gestures towards big themes (Stu "got hints of mortality", says Brad), but seeing Steve Martin's frictionless crisscrossing is bound to raise memories of *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987), an incomparably superior film that earned its sentimentality.

• Henry K. Miller

CREDITS

Produced by
Karen Rosenthal
Stuart Cornfield
Curtis Hanson

Screenplay

Howard Franklin
Inspired by the book by
Mark Obmascik

Director of Photography

Lawrence Sher

Film Editor

Mark Livolsi

Production Designer

Brent Thomas

Music

Theodore Shapiro

Production Sound Mixer

David Husby

Costume Designer

Monique Prudhomme

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Film Corporation and

Dune Entertainment III

LLC (in all territories

except Brazil, Italy,

Japan, Korea and Spain)

Production Companies

Fox 2000 Pictures

presents a Red Hour

Films/Deuce

Three/Sunswept

Entertainment

production

Made in association

with Dune

Entertainment and

Ingenious Media

Produced in association

CREDITS

Produced by
Carol Fenlon
Ben Stiller
Jeremy Kramer

CAST

Steve Martin
Stu Preissler

Jack Black

Brad Harris

Owen Wilson

Kenny Bostick

Brian Dennehy

Raymond

Anjelica Huston

Annie Auklet

Rashida Jones

Ellie

Rosamund Pike

Jessica

Dianne Wiest

Brenda

JoBeth Williams

Edith

Anthony Anderson

Bill Clement

Corbin Bernsen

Gil Gordon

Barry Shabaka Henley

Dr Neil Kramer

Joel McHale

Barry Loomis

Tim Blake Nelson

Fuchs

Jim Parsons

Crane

Kevin Pollak

Jim Gittelson

Dolby Digital/SDDS In Colour

Prints by

DeLuxe

[2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

8,994 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS US, the present. Three strangers travel all over the country to take part in the 'Big Year', a bird-watching contest to spot the largest number of species in a 12-month period. Narrator Brad Harris is a 36-year-old divorcee living with his parents; Stu Preissler is a millionaire businessman who can't bring himself to retire; Kenny Bostick is the reigning champion. The competition causes the three men to ignore their responsibilities at home (Brad must earn money, Stu has to negotiate a deal, and Kenny needs to support his wife Jessica as she undergoes fertility treatment), especially when a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico brings about a 'fallout' of rare birds. Brad and Stu become friendly rivals; Kenny is aloof and plays dirty. Brad is attracted to bird-watcher Ellie, but discovers that she has a boyfriend. When Stu's daughter-in-law has a baby and Brad's father suffers a heart attack, both men reconsider their priorities. Kenny, however, presses on, destroying his marriage in pursuit of victory. Stu, who comes fourth in the contest, is finally content to retire. Brad finishes second, gaining Ellie's affections and his father's respect.

Bombay Beach

USA 2011

Director: Alma Har'el

in case it eluded anyone – is that relationships matter more than money. Brad himself learns the importance of having a sweet and really pretty girlfriend who also likes bird-watching.

As for Kenny, "Only he knows the price he paid to be the greatest birder in the world," says Brad – nonsensically, since we know what happens to his marriage. What we don't have access to is his obsession, its causes, its marrow. While a couple of Wilson's scenes with Pike approach drama, even these have a stock light-comedy subplot to resolve – Kenny is worried that she's carrying on with the decorator – and the dominant tone is cloying and complacent. *The Big Year* has a strikingly impressive cast, perhaps attracted by a script that sort of gestures towards big themes (Stu "got hints of mortality", says Brad), but seeing Steve Martin's frictionless crisscrossing is bound to raise memories of *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987), an incomparably superior film that earned its sentimentality.

• Henry K. Miller

with Big Screen
Productions

Executive Producers
Carol Fenlon
Ben Stiller
Jeremy Kramer

CAST

Steve Martin
Stu Preissler
Jack Black
Brad Harris
Owen Wilson
Kenny Bostick
Brian Dennehy
Raymond
Anjelica Huston
Annie Auklet
Rashida Jones
Ellie
Rosamund Pike
Jessica
Dianne Wiest
Brenda
JoBeth Williams
Edith
Anthony Anderson
Bill Clement
Corbin Bernsen
Gil Gordon
Barry Shabaka Henley
Dr Neil Kramer
Joel McHale
Barry Loomis
Tim Blake Nelson
Fuchs
Jim Parsons
Crane
Kevin Pollak
Jim Gittelson

**Dolby Digital/SDDS
In Colour**

Prints by
DeLuxe

[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

8,994 ft +0 frames

The film's most compelling and ambiguous moments come via the Parrishes, who are alternately sweet and articulate and, with their shared preoccupation with causing explosions, scary. The trials of little Benny – a perennially watchful and tense six- or seven-year-old whose uncontrollability will not be muffled by any mood-altering drug the doctors try – express poignantly the miseries of childhood mental illness and/or over-medication; and long shots of his fellow children in avid play produce as many adorable moments as long shots of children playing will tend to do. The destructive and self-destructive impulses of Benny's father Mike Parrish are indicated in a scene that sees him attack a friend and then declare that all he wants is to be beaten up, as penance for what his family has been through.

Other sequences feel at once voyeuristic and overly constructed, as when a group of teen boys hellbent on upping their sexual experience boast for the camera about "popping cherries"; or when a dramatic and obviously staged encounter between Jessie and her ex-boyfriend Bentley suddenly plunges us into the soapy territory of *Dawson's Creek*.

The drive to capture and poeticise the most spare and challenged lives calls to mind Harmony Korine, Larry Clark and Diane Arbus, as well as low-key documentary-style fiction films by David Gordon Green (*George Washington, All the Real Girls*) and Matthew Porterfield (*Hamilton, Putty Hill*). Har'el's leanings are warmer and more sentimental, however, and sometimes her fondness for carefully lit montages of chuckling kids, cuddling families and wise-faced old-timers can make her seem more like a Norman Rockwell for the new recession. The further decision to frame some parts of the narrative as dance pieces is a bold one. It's presumably intended – like Clio Barnard's choice to use lip-

synching actors as mouthpieces for real dialogue in *The Arbor* (2010) – to distance us from the narratives, and to give their protagonists an artistic dignity that clears the filmmaker of charges of simply presenting a freak show. But the sequences do come across as overblown, their content a little blunt in its symbolism (a teenage interracial couple subject to racist abuse slow-dance in a ring of white masks; young misfit Benny is cold-shouldered by a group of jeering kids). And the very verbose, sincere backing to these numbers provided by original songs by Beirut and Bob Dylan further gilds the lily. Too often these parts seem less like sincere expressions of the characters' feelings and more like pretentiously solemn pop videos.

How constructed and aestheticised you like your documentaries is largely a matter of personal taste; but narrative material as strong as some of this is didn't need so much manipulation in the telling. ♦ **Hannah McGill**

CREDITS

Produced by

Alma Har'el

Boaz Yakin

Cinematography

Alma Har'el

Edited by

Joe Lindquist

Alma Har'el

Original Music

Zach Condon

Music

Beirut

Bob Dylan

CREDITS

Sound Design

Dror Mohar

Production Company

Produced by Bombay

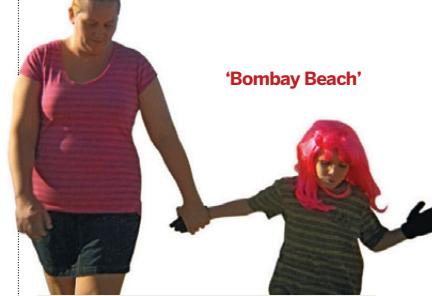
Films, Inc.

A film by Alma Har'el

In Colour

Distributor

Dogwoof Pictures



'Bombay Beach'

SYNOPSIS Bombay Beach, California, the present. Through documentary footage, home movies, reconstructed events and choreographed dance sequences, the film surveys lives led in tiny, poverty-stricken communities on the edge of Salton Sea, a saline lake in the Colorado Desert. Archive footage shows that the lake was once a popular tourist destination, though it now appears filthy and desolate. Dorran 'Red' Forgy, an elderly resident who sells bootlegged cigarettes, describes his beliefs and life experiences in voiceover, and is seen visiting and gossiping with locals. Hyperactive child Benny Parrish weathers persistent increases in the dosage of his medications, and prepares for his first day at school; his parents Mike and Sarah recall the life events that have seen their children taken away from them and into care twice. Ceejay Thompson, a teenager recently arrived from LA, experiences first love with local girl Jessie and pursues his hopes of one day joining the NFL.

Carnage

France/Germany/
Poland/Spain 2011

Director: Roman Polanski

Certificate 15 79m 39s

As the Longstreets and the Cowans meet to discuss a playground scrap over cake and coffee, *Carnage* invites us to what is possibly the least relaxing social gathering on film since Buñuel's doomed dinner party. In this crisp, coruscating adaptation of Yasmina Reza's hit play *The God of Carnage*, Roman Polanski lays bare the indiscreet charms of the bourgeoisie, substituting a blackly funny naturalism for the more stylised stage antics of the original.

Reza, who adapts her text deftly for the screen with Polanski, strips well-to-do Brooklyn civilisation down to savagery with relish, the film revelling in the afternoon's rapid, real-time descent into naked aggression, marital misery and existential isolation. In the manner – if without the firepower – of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, she arms the quartet with words as weapons right from round one. Passive-aggressive mother Penelope can't resist the pejorative use of "armed" and "disfigured" when describing the injury to her son, injecting a giggling unease into the elaborate conviviality of her chat with increasingly less genial husband Michael and the parents of her son's assailant, urbanely disengaged lawyer Alan and his devoted wife Nancy.

With the protagonists trapped by Polanski's cruelly telling shot compositions (which are eloquent but isolating, where the simultaneous interplay of characters on stage was uproarious), the visual mood turns as tense as the conversation. Polanski uses space as brilliantly to express ego-driven social confinement as he did to show urban alienation in *Repulsion* (1965) or *The Tenant* (1976), the camerawork pointing up deliciously the shifting and shredding alliances by couple or gender, the verbal assaults that strip their deliverer along with their target, and the eventual comic desolation of the characters. Paweł Edelman's cinematography and Hervé de Luze's editing initially draw these patterns subtly, then slide into a more dynamic mode, with extreme close-ups and unsettling cuts underlining the comedy of emotional disintegration.

As the couples fail to agree on whether the boys should be reconciled, remonstrated with or applauded for healthy aggression, the stakes move – from which family is at fault to which view of civilisation. Reza's script is artful and fluid here, swiftly squaring up Penelope's improving-liberal take on the world against Alan's derisive view that violence is inevitable and irresistible. What prevents the dramatic gears crunching, as courtesies crumble ("Their son is a threat to homeland security!") and betrayals fight with Reza's characteristic 'big ideas lite' for airspace, is the film's elegance, the balance of humour and argument adroitly held for a neatly



The social fretwork: Jodie Foster, John C. Reilly, Christoph Waltz, Kate Winslet

honed 79 minutes. It's a skilful dance of ideas and performances, somehow compensating for the lack of the physical comedy that drove the play so energetically on stage. Though *Carnage* retains Nancy's projectile vomiting and Penelope's handbag-hurling, they're only socially transgressive on film, not the theatrical explosions that made one flinch in the stalls.

Here the power and the glee are in the uniformly excellent playing: Jodie Foster's Penelope is a revelation, wringing laughs from every stage of her slide from smug, point-scoring idealist to mean, marriage-wrecking drunk. As her secretly Neanderthal husband Michael, John C. Reilly adds a note of misanthropic menace, and Christoph Waltz's Alan overcomes the script's sneaking admiration for his sweeping

CREDITS

Produced by
Said Ben Said

Screen Play
Yasmina Reza

Roman Polanski
Based on the play *Le Dieu du carnage* [The God of Carnage] by Yasmina Reza

Translated by Michael Katims

Director of

Photography
Paweł Edelman

Editor
Hervé de Luze

Production Designer
Dean Tavoularis

MUSIC

Alexandre Desplat
Production Sound
Mixer
Jean-Marie Blondel

Costume Designer
Milena Canonero

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Constantin Film
Produktion, SPI Film
Studio, Versatil Cinema,
S.L., Zanagar Films,
France 2 Cinema

Production
Companies
Said Ben Said presents
an SBS Productions,
Constantin Film
Produktion, SPI Film

worldview by the sniggering cynicism of his cell-phone plotting to quell a pharmaceutical scandal. Kate Winslet seems slightly less at ease as Nancy, a role that runs unnervingly and sometimes unevenly from peacemaker to vengeful harpy.

The characters' all-round unpleasantness, and the film's merciless mirth-making with their failings, keeps things buoyantly, bleakly funny, the satire spot-on from Dean Tavoularis's art-crammed aspirational set onwards. But there's a chip of ice in the film's heart – a lack of empathy, the kind of pathos that Albee musters for George and Martha, or Ayckbourn for his stumbling couples – which prevents the film attaining the tragicomic status it would seem to deserve.

••• Kate Stables

John C. Reilly
Michael Longstreet
Elvis Polanski
Zachary
Eliot Berger
Ethan

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited
7,168 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Brooklyn, present day. Alan and Nancy Cowan are at the home of Penelope and Michael Longstreet to discuss son Zachary having injured their hosts' son Ethan with a stick during a playground argument. Though they are all polite, no one can agree on laying blame, or whether the boys should talk it out. Lawyer Alan takes work calls constantly regarding a newspaper investigation into a pharmaceutical client's drug. It emerges that Ethan excluded Zachary from his gang. Nancy accuses Alan of being disengaged, and vomits Penelope's cake over the coffee table, ruining a rare book. Michael's mother calls – she is taking the disputed drug; Michael tries to stop her, and is hostile towards Alan. The couples bond briefly against one another. Scotch is drunk, and marital strains surface. Penelope accuses Michael of settling for mediocrity, and he belittles marriage. Alan opines that violence has been inevitable throughout time. Penelope hits Michael when he stops her emoting about Africa. Nancy dunks Alan's mobile phone in a flower vase because his ceaseless calls ruin their life. Penelope refuses Nancy's offer of shared blame for the boys' fight, and throws Nancy's bag across the room. Nancy declares she's proud that her boy hit their son. In the park, we see a pair of boys being friendly.

Coriolanus

United Kingdom/USA/Serbia 2010

Director: Ralph Fiennes

Certificate 15 122m 53s

Coriolanus has never previously been adapted for the cinema, and there's a reason for that. Not only is Shakespeare's late-period verse complex, but the unsympathetic hero is an arrogant killing machine in thrall to a formidable mother (Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate describes him as "Peter Pan in full body armour"). It's daunting material for Ralph Fiennes's arresting directorial debut, but his choices are always intelligent, even if the astringent play remains at arm's length.

Many screen Shakespeares occupy fantastical worlds (Julie Taymor's *The Tempest*, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*) or lush period settings (Kenneth Branagh's movies), but Fiennes's film looks quite different. There's no classical grandeur to this Rome (the film was shot in Belgrade) – it's a grimy, modern cityscape riddled with graffiti, rubble and the grey pall of deprivation. Director of photography Barry Ackroyd, who has worked with Paul Greengrass and on Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker*, establishes a panicky, documentary atmosphere – his cameras, caught up in angry demonstrations and tense combat, lunge about to keep up with the flurried action.

After a blood-welted opening, the film sinks into murky political bargaining. The impetus slackens, but Fiennes and screenwriter John Logan (*Gladiator*) scrape back the knotty text, distilling the sense of integrity at bay. In a world of rolling news, *Coriolanus* is unable to develop a camera-friendly persona: images of his scarlet face, steaming with fury, fill the screen. As well as video-messaging and hostage-killing staged for the camera, headline banners on the ubiquitous 'Fidelis' news channel keep us up to speed, aided by some distinguished verse-speaking from newscaster Jon Snow.

Fiennes both directs and stars: he's an impressively unsympathetic actor, and *Coriolanus*'s chilly contempt suits him (he played the role in 2000 in a temporary theatre in London's then disused Gainsborough film studios). The general's tongue-lashing disdain, delivered with furious clarity, scours both opponents and his own troops – but Fiennes also digs into a will to self-annihilation. Rather than hear himself extolled before the senate, he scurries from the chamber to a deserted corridor. The scarred terrain of his torso suggests a man shaped for war; his glassy eyes, unflinching at slaughter, can't look on compromising peace. His death – the corpse unceremoniously dumped on a truck (unlike the text's solemn ending) – seems inevitable.

Productions of the play frequently pick up a homoerotic note between Coriolanus and his admired adversary Aufidius (especially Elijah Moshinsky's panting 1984 BBC version). There's a gruff intimacy here too: Fiennes and Gerard Butler's Aufidius gouge and



Staging a war: Ralph Fiennes

grunt in sweaty combat, crashing through a window wrapped about each other. Later, Aufidius tenderly shaves his erstwhile enemy's head, and the final killing in a roadside ambush is the closest thing we see to a cuddle.

Combat is Coriolanus's element: Rome's political horse-trading frustrates him. A solid British cast lends gravitas to these muttered convocations in bars and corridors – especially Brian Cox as a rumpled senator and James Nesbitt and Paul Jesson as opportunistic tribunes. Vanessa Redgrave gives Coriolanus's adamantine mother

echoes of Angela Lansbury's hawkish matriarch in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). "Anger's my meat," she spits. "I sup upon myself." Fiennes foregrounds Coriolanus's near-silent wife (Jessica Chastain), a lone dove in this world of hawks and Roman eagles. Opening the bathroom door to find Coriolanus's mother tending his wounds, she backs away as if intruding, but finds no sanctuary amid the toy armoury of her young son's bedroom. Fiennes creates a pitiless world without refuge, where neither the soft nor the unbending can survive. **• David Jays**

CREDITS

Produced by
Ralph Fiennes
John Logan
Gabrielle Tana
Julia Taylor-Stanley
Colin Vaines
Screenplay
John Logan
Based on the play by William Shakespeare
Director of Photography
Barry Ackroyd
Editor
Nic Gaster
Production Designer
Ricky Eynes
Composer
Ilan Eshkeri
Production Sound Mixer
Ray Beckett

Costume Designer

Bojana Nikitović
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Production Companies
The Weinstein Company and Hermeto Pictures, Magna Films and Icon Entertainment International present in association with Lip Sync Productions LLC and BBC Films a Kalkronike production in association with Atlantic Swiss Productions, Artemis Films, Magnolia Mae Films and Synchronistic Pictures A Lonely Dragon production

Executive Producers

Will Young
Robert Whitehouse
Christopher Figg
Norman Merry
Christine Langan
Anthony Buckner

CAST

Ralph Fiennes
Caius Martius, 'Coriolanus'
Gerard Butler
Tullus Aufidius
Vanessa Redgrave
Volumnia
Brian Cox
Menenius
Jessica Chastain
Virginia
John Kani
General Cominius

James Nesbitt

Sicinius
Paul Jesson
Brutus
Lubna Azabal
Tamara
Ashraf Barhom
Cassius
Dragan Micanovic
Titus Lartius

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

11,058 ft +15 frames

SYNOPSIS A 21st-century city called Rome suffers from faction-ridden government, protests about food shortages and military raids on its borders. The patrician general Caius Martius successfully leads a campaign against the Volscians, whose leader Tullus Aufidius threatens Rome. For securing the town of Corioli, Martius receives the honorary title of 'Coriolanus', and to the joy of his mother Volumnia is nominated for the consulship. However, the people's representatives abhor his arrogance; when Coriolanus denounces them, he is banished as a traitor. He makes his way to the Volscians, where Aufidius warily accepts him; they declare war on Rome. Coriolanus rejects appeals for mercy, until Volumnia persuades him to broker a treaty between Rome and the Volscians. Aufidius resents being deprived of victory; his men ambush and kill Coriolanus.

The Descendants

USA/United Kingdom 2011

Director: Alexander Payne

Certificate 15 114m 54s

The Descendants is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page 58.

CREDITS

Produced by
Jim Burke
Alexander Payne
Jim Taylor

Screenplay
Alexander Payne
Nat Faxon
Jim Rash

Based upon the novel by Kau Hart Hemmings

Director of Photography
Phedon Papamichael

Film Editor
Kevin Tent

Production Designer
Jane Ann Stewart
Production Sound

Mixer

Jose Antonio Garcia
Costume Designer
Wendy Chuck

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Production Companies

Fox Searchlight Pictures presents an Ad Hominem Enterprises production Made in association with Dune Entertainment and produced in association with Little Blair Productions and Ingenious Film Partners

CAST

George Clooney
Matt King
Shailene Woodley
Alexandra King
Beau Bridges
cousin Hugh
Robert Forster
Scott Thorson

Judy Greer
Julie Speer

Matthew Lillard
Brian Speer

Nick Krause
Sid

Amara Miller
Scottie King

Mary Birdsong
Kai Mitchell

Rob Huebel
Mark Mitchell

Patricia Hastie
Elizabeth King



While you were cheating: Woodley, Clooney, Forster, Southerm

SYNOPSIS Present-day O'ahu, Hawaii. Elizabeth, wife of prosperous lawyer Matt King, is injured while waterskiing and lies unconscious in hospital. Matt picks up his younger daughter, ten-year-old Scottie, from school. As sole trustee of 25,000 acres of unspoiled land inherited from his forebears, he's obliged to sell it by a change in the law, and is conferring with his cousins (who will all become rich from the sale) over whom to sell it to. Dr Johnston tells Matt that Elizabeth's case is hopeless, and in accordance with her wishes they must switch off her life support. With Scottie, Matt picks up his elder daughter, 17-year-old Alexandra, from her private school. Back home, he tells her what the doctor said and reproaches her for speaking harshly of her mother. Alex tells him Elizabeth was having an affair.

Matt finds out the name of Elizabeth's lover – Brian Speer, a local realtor. Learning that Brian is holidaying on Kaua'i, he flies there with his daughters and Alex's dumb jock boyfriend Sid to track him down. He locates Brian in a cottage where he's staying with his wife Julie and two sons, and learns from his cousin Ralph that if the land deal goes through, Brian stands to profit handsomely. Calling on Brian on a pretext, Matt confronts him and tells him Elizabeth will soon die.

Back home, Matt has Dr Johnston tell Scottie about her mother. The cousins assemble to see Matt sign away the land, but at the last minute he decides not to sell, but to find a way to circumvent the new law. At the hospital, as Matt and his daughters take their final farewells of Elizabeth, Julie shows up and tells Matt that she found out about Brian's infidelity. Matt and his daughters scatter Elizabeth's ashes at sea.

Film Audio Extracts
March of the Penguins (2005)

Dolby Digital/SDDS
Colour by
Modern Videofilm
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

10,341 ft +0 frames

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

USA/Sweden 2011
Director: David Fincher

"You can't try anyone for what they did 35 years ago." So complains journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Daniel Craig) towards the end of David Fincher's long-awaited *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, summarising the sense of helpless belatedness that pervades not only the film's narrative but also its origins. For it features a very cold case in a cold climate, as Blomkvist investigates the disappearance 40 years earlier of a teenage girl; and it is adapted (by Steven Zaillian) from Stieg Larsson's bestselling novel, published posthumously but originally written in part to exorcise the author's guilt for failing to intervene in 1969 when, aged 15, he witnessed the gang rape of a teenager named Lisbeth. In the novel, Lisbeth is reimagined as Lisbeth Salander, a punkish, no-nonsense 23-year-old hacker who reacts with violent effectiveness against any abuse perpetrated upon her by men – and so *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is a tale of rape-revenge, as well as a political thriller exposing Sweden's hidden history of fascism (another of Larsson's favourite subjects as an investigative journalist).

Fincher's film also belongs to that most belated (and bemoaned) of genres, the Hollywood remake – yet if Fincher failed to get in there first, at least his version improves markedly on Niels Arden Oplev's 2009 Swedish-language original which, despite Noomi Rapace turning heroine Salander into an emo feminist icon, had a movie-of-the-week dullness to its mise en scène, far too much clumsy exposition and an end sequence that was overlong, over-sentimental and entirely out of keeping with the tone of what had preceded it. Fincher, on the other hand, who has proven form when it comes to moody psycho-thrillers (*Seven, Zodiac*), turns Larsson's literary materials into thumping, pumping cinema. If the enigmatic Citizen Kane prologue, with pressed flowers substituting for the rosebud, doesn't grab the attention, then the opening credits certainly will, as a petrol-dripping kaleidoscope of bodies, flowers, insects, keyboards and dragons is syncopated along to Trent Reznor and Karen O's pounding resurrection of Led Zeppelin's 'Immigrant Song' (the cover version rehearsing the film's thematic concern with the interchange of past and present). In all its impressionistic stylisation, this mimics the title sequence to a James Bond film, but is less titillating and more disturbing, making it the perfect introduction to protagonist Blomkvist, played by the current Bond but very different in character. For, in a neat inversion of ooy's gender norms, this new man is outclassed, dominated and ultimately saved by Salander (played with brittle vulnerability by Rooney Mara). Fincher lets Larsson's story unfold with great



Breathing fire: Rooney Mara, Yorick van Wageningen

verve, breathless economy and the odd tweak to the novel's narrative, along the way fixing all the problems in Oplev's earlier film and shifting the emphases of the final sequences for a Christmas close (perfectly timed for the movie's late-December release date in the US and UK) that's far more satisfying in its bittersweet impact.

Unlike, say, Matt Reeves's *Let Me In* (2010), Fincher and Zaillian keep their remake in Sweden, staying true to their source but also creating the occasional jarring note. It is an acceptable artifice that Swedish characters should all speak English, but less acceptable that some actors (Stellan Skarsgård) have, or at least put on (Mara), a Swedish accent,

when others (notably Craig) do not. Still, by shifting the plot from 2002 to 2006, so that its epilogue now coincides with the 2007 credit crunch, Fincher's film highlights the continuities linking the sins of the past to our own contemporary problems. For here, patriarchy is a family business whose corrupt practices and licensed entitlements are passed from father to son in a succession that, if left unchecked, will always lead to horrific abuse, whether sexual or economic. This is a finely honed genre thriller, but it also continues Fincher's preoccupation with the persistence of age-old urges in the modern world.

• Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Scott Rudin
Ole Søndberg
Søren Stærmose
Céan Chaffin
Screenplay
Steven Zaillian
based on the book by
Stieg Larsson
**Director of
Photography**
Jeff Cronenweth
Editors
Kirk Baxter
Angus Wall
Production Designer
Donald Graham Burt

Music
Trent Reznor
Atticus Ross
Sound Design
Ren Klyce
Costume Designer
Trish Summerville

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Industries, Inc. and
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Pictures Inc.
**Production
Companies**
Columbia Pictures and
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Pictures present a Scott
Rudin/Yellow Bird
production

A David Fincher film
Executive Producers
Steven Zaillian
Mikael Wallen
Anni Faarbye Fernandez

CAST

Daniel Craig
Mikael Blomkvist
Rooney Mara
Lisbeth Salander
Christopher Plummer
Henrik Vanger
Stellan Skarsgård
Martin Vanger
Steven Berkoff
Dirch Frode

Robin Wright
Erika Berger
**Yorick van
Wageningen**
Nils Bjurman
Joely Richardson
Anita Vanger
Geraldine James
Cecilia Vanger

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS**
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

SYNOPSIS Sweden, 2006. Discredited in court by industrialist Wennerström, middle-aged journalist Mikael Blomkvist asks sometime lover Erika to replace him as publisher of Millennium magazine. Having been investigated and declared clean by 23-year-old hacker Lisbeth Salander for a report secretly commissioned by Henrik Vanger (long-retired CEO of Sweden's most powerful family business), Blomkvist is hired to look into the 1966 disappearance (and presumed murder) of Henrik's grand-niece Harriet from the Vangers' island home. Meanwhile, Salander's new legal guardian Bjurman blackmails her into abusive sex, until she films him raping her and blackmails him back. Realising that Harriet had been gathering evidence of serial murders, Blomkvist turns to Salander for assistance in identifying the killer, and they become lovers.

Learning, through photographic evidence and intuition, that Harriet was probably killed by her brother Martin (now CEO of Vanger Corporation), Blomkvist goes to Martin's house. Martin confesses that he continued the spate of rapes and murders begun by his father Gottfried, but denies killing Harriet. About to kill Blomkvist, Martin is attacked by Salander and dies in his crashed car just before Salander can shoot him. Blomkvist finds Harriet living in London under the assumed identity of her long-dead cousin Anita – Harriet killed abusive father Gottfried in 1965 and fled Martin a year later.

Blomkvist brings new evidence (furnished by Salander) of illegal conduct against Wennerström. Undercover in Zurich, Salander empties Wennerström's offshore accounts. Wennerström is assassinated by criminal associates. Salander returns to Blomkvist at Christmas, only to see him arm in arm with Erika.

Happy Feet Two

Australia/USA 2011
Director: George Miller
Certificate U 103m 14s

Of the 2006 animated film *Happy Feet*, this reviewer wrote that it was "an eccentric, overblown, enjoyably dizzying experience". The sequel, again directed by *Mad Max*'s George Miller, is less surefooted in basic ways, but the same description could apply. The first *Happy Feet* took Cecil B. DeMille hubris into animation, with vast icy landscapes and a penguin cast of thousands participating in kitsch song-and-dance numbers. *Happy Feet Two* takes this a step further. Its plot has an overtly Old Testament feel, with the hero's land trapped by shifting ice cliffs, obliging him to literally move mountains.

The problem, though, is who is the hero? None of the characters in the first *Happy Feet* were very memorable, especially as most of them looked inevitably similar (being penguins). Whereas the first film at least had a sturdy hero's journey, the sequel meanders clumsily between half-baked protagonists, old and new. (Grown-ups may be confused about who all the 'old' characters are, though kids who've worn out their *Happy Feet* DVD from repeated viewings will be up to speed.)

The best characters are new, and they're not penguins but a pair of bug-eyed krill. They wander in and out of the film in the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern manner long perfected by scene-stealing characters in cartoons (for example, the squirrel-like Scrat in

SYNOPSIS Antarctica, the present. Emperor penguin Mumble realises that his infant son Erik, upset at being a misfit, has run away. Mumble follows Erik to the land of the rockhopper penguins, who idolise Sven, a strange penguin who can fly. Mumble takes Erik back, only to find that melting ice has caused huge cliffs to block off their home. All the other emperor penguins, including Mumble's mate Gloria, are trapped. Cut off from the sea, they face starvation.

The rockhopper penguins come to help, bringing fish from the sea to feed the prisoners. They also lead the crew of a human ship to the spot; the humans work to free the penguins. However, a huge storm blows up, driving the humans away and freezing the sea. Inspired by Sven, the emperor penguins try to fly, until Sven confesses that he's not a penguin at all, but a puffin.

Mumble hits on the idea of causing an avalanche to create an escape for the penguins. Erik – who is able to move people and animals by singing opera – persuades giant elephant seals to come and help. Finally they cause an avalanche, and Mumble's people climb to freedom. Mumble and Gloria embrace.



Polar position: 'Happy Feet Two'

Ice Age, 2002). Voiced by Brad Pitt and Matt Damon, the krill set a notable precedent, being the most openly gay couple to appear in a Hollywood family cartoon film to date.

Like the first film, *Happy Feet Two* is foremost a monstrous spectacle, with endless 'camera' swoops around massive landscapes, creatures and crowds. Cartoon connoisseurs can protest that the penguin dancing is still an ugly travesty of the 'Jolly Holiday' number in *Mary Poppins* (1964), or that the CGI slickness feels icy compared to the wriggly drawn details of a film such as *Ponyo* (2008). Yet Miller's film has pieces of inspired story – for example, an Aesop-style subplot involving a macho elephant seal – and it culminates in a splendid finale where all creatures great and small, high and low, unite to shake the world.

◆ Andrew Osmond

CREDITS

Co-directors
David Peers
Gary Eck
Producers
Doug Mitchell
George Miller
Bill Miller
Written by
George Miller
Gary Eck
Warren Coleman
Paul Livingston
Cinematographers
Camera:
David Peers
Lighting:
David Dulac
Edited by
Christian Gazzal
Production Designer
David Nelson
Music Composed and Songs Produced by
John Powell
Sound Designer
Wayne Pashley
Animation Director
Rob Coleman

©Village Roadshow
Mumble 2 Productions
Pty Ltd
Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with Village Roadshow Pictures a Kennedy Miller Mitchell production with Dr. D. Studios
A George Miller film
Made with the assistance of the NSW Government
Executive Producers
Chris deFaria
Philip Hearnshaw
Graham Burke
Bruce Berman

VOICE CAST

Elijah Wood
Mumble
Robin Williams
Lovelace, the rockhopper
Hank Azaria
The Mighty Sven
Alecia Moore (P'nk)
Gloria
Brad Pitt
Will the krill
Matt Damon
Bill the krill
Sofia Vergara
Carmen
Common
Seymour
Hugo Weaving
Noah the elder
Magda Szubanski
Miss Viola
Anthony LaPaglia
the alpha skua
Richard Carter
Bryan the benchmaster
Benjamin 'Lil P-Nut' Flores Jr
Atticus

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Warner Bros. Distributors (UK)

9,291 ft +0 frames
Includes short film / *Taw I Taw a Puddy Tat*

IMAX prints
104m 2s
149.820 ft

Haywire

USA/Ireland 2011

Director: Steven Soderbergh

Like Graham Greene setting his 'entertainments' apart from his literary works, Steven Soderbergh seems increasingly to fluctuate between seriousness and fun. Just as there was no mistaking *Che* (2008), the director's four-hour life of Guevara, for an 'entertainment', it takes only moments to realise that *Haywire*, a busily kinetic thriller flitting from New York State to Barcelona to Dublin to New Mexico, is one of his *amuse-bouches*, in which he gets to flex his action muscles, stripping away all but the bare essentials of character and story logic in order to drink deep from the well of breathless movement.

The film opens in wintry upstate New York with an apparently innocuous meeting in a diner between Mallory (Gina Carano) and Aaron (Channing Tatum) that quickly escalates into a brisk death-match of chops, kicks and strangleholds. Escaping her would-be assassin in the car and company of bemused bystander Scott (Michael Angarano), who helps bandage her injured arm even as she puts pedal to metal, Mallory explains that she is a government-trained operative who has been double-crossed by her employers. *Haywire* then rattles backwards in time to detail first a thrillingly conceived set piece in Barcelona, in which Mallory and Aaron are both involved in a mission to liberate a Chinese journalist, then a follow-up assignment at a swanky private soirée in Dublin where Mallory is employed as reluctant better half to suave fellow agent Paul (Michael Fassbender).

Filling out the cast with starry names such as Michael Douglas and Antonio Banderas (enjoying himself as a grey-whiskered rogue), shooting in richly sensual colours and ratcheting up the excitement with a dynamic but often over-insistent Lalo Schifrin-esque score by David Holmes, Soderbergh has whipped together a film that is nothing if not seductive. For all the sunny tone of directorial relaxation, there's nothing here that isn't precise and exactingly filmed. Time and again, Soderbergh shows his mastery of action technique, filming and editing each set-to with electrifying composure, as the widescreen frame becomes a playground for limbs outstretched in combat. The chase across the roofs of Dublin; the brutal, hotel-suite-destroying skirmish between Mallory and Paul; a precipitous high-speed drive in reverse gear through a snowy forest – all exhibit an effortless finesse and capability.

What *Haywire* misses in all this pell-mell forward momentum is anything to make us care about each minute-by-minute outcome. Taking its lead from the Bourne series, with its amnesia-suffering blank-slate hero, Soderbergh's film is content to splash around in the shallow end, self-consciously eschewing depth, emotional involvement and



Cut to the chase: Gina Carano

characterisation. So much the better for Gina Carano, a graduate from the world of martial arts, who is an appealing presence without yet being a fully convincing actress. Mallory isn't meant to be cuddly, it's true: she's a resolutely unsentimental figure, an engine of killing and doing, trained in the art of pure action. "You shouldn't think of her as being a woman," warns shady agent Kenneth (Ewan McGregor). "That would be a mistake."

Even so, determinedly stylish sequences such as the Dublin soiree

CREDITS

Produced by
Gregory Jacobs
Written by
Lem Dobbs
Director of Photography
Peter Andrews
[i.e. Steven Soderbergh]
Edited by
Mary Ann Bernard
[i.e. Steven Soderbergh]
Production Design
Howard Cummings
Music
David Holmes
Production Sound Mixer
Dennis Towns
Costume Design
Shoshana Rubin

Stunt Co-ordinator
R.A. Rondell
Fight Choreographer
J.J. Perry
Production Companies
Relativity presents with the participation of Bord Scannána hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
Edited by
Mary Ann Bernard
[i.e. Steven Soderbergh]
Production Design
Howard Cummings
Music
David Holmes
Production Sound Mixer
Dennis Towns
Costume Design
Shoshana Rubin

Tucker Tooley
Michael Polaire
CAST
Gina Carano
Mallory Kane
Michael Fassbender
Paul
Ewan McGregor
Kenneth
Bill Paxton
John Kane
Channing Tatum
Aaron
Michael Angarano
Scott
Mathieu Kassovitz
Studer
Antonio Banderas
Rodrigo

Michael Douglas
Alex Coblenz
Anthony Brandon Wong
Jiang
Dolby Digital/Datasat
In Colour/Black and White
Prints by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled
Distributor
Momentum Pictures

SYNOPSIS Upstate New York, the present. To the alarm of customers in a remote diner, a meeting between Mallory Kane and apparent friend Aaron turns into a brutal fight. Mallory escapes in the car of bystander Scott; she tells him that she is a former Marine, now contracted out on special missions, and begins to explain why she's on the run.

In Barcelona some time before, Mallory and Aaron are involved in a high-risk mission to rescue a Chinese journalist. After this, American executive Coblenz and Spanish official Rodrigo insist that point man Kenneth employ Mallory on a mission in Dublin as the wife of fellow operative Paul. At a grand country-house party, Mallory discovers the body of the journalist and realises that there is an attempt afoot to frame her. When Paul tries to kill Mallory in their hotel room, a fight ensues which ends with Mallory shooting Paul dead. By checking Paul's phone, Mallory realises that it is Kenneth who has double-crossed her. Mallory and Scott double-back after their car meets a police roadblock, leading to a chase through a forest. With Kenneth and his employers trying to track Mallory's whereabouts, Mallory makes her way across America, heading for her father's home in New Mexico. Knowing that Kenneth and Aaron will look for her there, she lies in wait for them. After a confrontation at the house, Kenneth escapes. Coblenz invites Mallory to work for him, but Mallory tells him that first she has some loose ends to tie up. She catches up separately with Kenneth and Rodrigo, and dishes out her revenge.

House of Tolerance

France 2010

Director: Bertrand Bonello

Writer-director Bertrand Bonello doesn't do subtle, he does lurid. His subject-matter – life inside a Parisian brothel at the turn of the 20th century – has him reaching for the nearest trowel and laying it on thick: flesh, violence, syphilis, someone crying tears of semen, a random panther – you name it, he's flinging it up there on screen. After just over two hours of this stuff, you may feel you need a shower.

Deeply creepy it may be, but nothing actually happens in this film. Clients come and go; the women wash and sleep. A new recruit (Iliana Zabeth) arrives and is shown the ropes; another (Jasmine Trinca) dies of syphilis. The action, such as it is, is bookended with a particularly unpleasant attack on one of the women (Alice Barnole), who is tied up by a client and has her face cut so that her scars form the parody of a smile. Bonello was clearly pleased with this scenario, since he revisits it repeatedly, but what on earth he wants it to mean is impossible to discern.

Somewhere along the line Bonello has heard rumour of that old film-studies chestnut (first written about by Laura Mulvey in the early 1970s) about the objectifying primacy of the male gaze, but he can't think of anything more interesting to do with it than simply sticking in lots of references to looking and power. Surely the worst thing you can do with a film about a brothel is to collude in the same kind of fantasy that brings the clients knocking with their tongues and wallets hanging out? Bonello presents us with a version of prostitution that's something like a girls' boarding school, though not a real boarding school of course (no acne here) but a dirty old man's fantasy involving lots of casual nudity and mutual hair-brushing. At one point one of the brothel's regular clients tries to join the girls as they go 'backstage' at the end of the night – he wants to see them in their off-duty personas. This is the privilege we, as spectators, are apparently offered by the film; but all we get is another version of the fantasy with which the women are inscribed during their working hours: see how pretty and



Belle du jour: Hafsa Herzi

sweet they are; how passive, trapped. Bonello doesn't seem able to imagine what else they might be.

If anything, he wants to present the women as uniquely privileged themselves: able to bask in the purity of utter objectification. He laboriously emphasises the film's temporal position on the border between *fin de siècle* aestheticism and impending modernity. For prostitutes at this historical moment, life is supposedly one big aesthetic kick; even when they're disfigured by violence or terminal illness, they can be lingered over as beautiful things.

CREDITS

Production
Kristina Larsen
Bertrand Bonello

Written by
Bertrand Bonello

Director of Photography
Josée Deshaies

Editor
Fabrice Rouaud

Art Direction
Alain Guffroy

Music
Bertrand Bonello
Sound
Jean-Pierre Duret
Nicolas Moreau

Jean-Pierre LaForce
Costumes
Anaïs Romand

©Les Films du
Lendemain, My New
Picture, Arte France
Cinéma

Production Companies

Les Films du Lendemain
and My New Picture
present in co-
production with
Arte France Cinéma
with the participation of
Canal+, CinéCinéma,
Arte France, Centre
national de la
cinématographie et de
l'image animée,
Soficinéma 7,
Soficinéma 6
Développement,
Cinéimage 5 with the
support of Région Ile-
de-France
a Les Films du
Lendemain & My New
Picture production
in co-production with
Arte France Cinéma
With the participation of
Canal+, CinéCinéma,
Arte France, Centre
national de la
cinématographie et de
l'image animée,
Soficinéma 7,
Soficinéma 6
Développement,
Cinéimage 5, Haut et
Court Distribution
With the support of
Région Ile-de-France
In partnership with
CNC, MEDIA
Programme of the
European Union

Yet if Bonello wants us to share the claustrophobia of the women's circumscribed lives, he fails. It's the film that's dying of suffocation, while we can never get inside. An aggressive opacity is part of what makes it so maddeningly pretentious, and its meandering, episodic structure refuses to amount to anything, until you're left with the inescapable conclusion that it's simply intended as an exercise in crass titillation. And this crassness isn't even the film's worst crime. Yes, it's stupid, politically dubious and offensive. But it's worse than that. It's boring.

— Lisa Mullen

Jasmine Trinca

Julie

Iliana Zabeth

Pauline

Noémie Lvovsky

Marie-France

Judith Lou Levy

Anais Thomass

Pauline Jacquard

Maïa Sandoz

Esther Garrel

Dolby Dolby
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
The Works UK
Distribution Ltd

French theatrical title
**L'Apollonide Souvenirs
de la maison close**

SYNOPSIS Paris, the turn of the 20th century. A group of prostitutes live in an expensive brothel. They rarely venture outside for fear of being arrested for soliciting. They are trapped by their debts to the brothel owner, which continue to grow no matter how hard they work.

One of the women, Madalene, is attacked by a client, who cuts her mouth so that she is left with scars resembling a smile; this scenario is revisited in flashbacks as the story unfolds. A new worker, Pauline, arrives; the others explain the rules of the house and guide her as she adjusts to the job. Clients include a man who repeatedly requests that one of the women act like a mechanical doll; one who is obsessed with champagne; one who only wants to look at the women; and one who likes to be spoken to in cod-Japanese by a woman dressed as a geisha.

The women have compulsory medical checks; Julie is diagnosed with syphilis, from which she slowly dies. Another woman descends into opium addiction. Pauline decides she wants to leave and slips away early one morning. Finally the rent on the building is increased and the brothel must close. Madalene's attacker returns for the farewell party, and the women take their revenge by locking him in a room with a panther, to be mauled to death.

Hugo

USA 2011

Director: Martin Scorsese
Certificate: U 125m 54s

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a major plot twist

The title character in Martin Scorsese's 3D family film *Hugo* is an orphan boy living in the hidden spaces of a fantastically stylised Paris in the early 1930s. For the film's first half, the story seems to be shaping into a mystery-adventure thriller, which may or may not involve actual magic. In the second half, however, one of the characters turns out to be a real (and legendary) figure from the dawn of film. From that point on, *Hugo* becomes a colourfully garnished history lesson about the figure in question, and an ode to silent cinema. It's a well-meant trick on Scorsese's part, and a novel way of promoting early film history to a multiplex audience. It's also a fundamentally dishonest lure.

Hugo is certainly a vivid concoction, beginning with an epic swoop into and through a bustling, smoke-wreathed Montparnasse station. Here, Hugo (Asa Butterfield from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*) climbs through cogs and scaffolding like a boy Quasimodo (though Hugo has no deformity and is in fact a rather well-scrubbed outcast). As in many children's films, the grown-up world is an overbearing threat: there's a station inspector (Sacha Baron Cohen) who snatches kids and banishes them to the orphanage; a nasty toyshop-owner (Ben Kingsley) who threatens to burn Hugo's treasured notebook; and the station crowds who indifferently trample children underfoot (the film's scariest moment).

Hugo's sole companion is a child-sized clockwork doll, found by his late father (Jude Law), which Hugo is sure holds some secret if he can only find the key. Meanwhile he spies on the station regulars going about their routines, impeded in their different ways. Baron Cohen's inspector longs to court a pretty flower-seller (Emily Mortimer) but is stymied by his leg brace, its squeaks proclaiming his emasculation. Hugo himself becomes friends with Isabelle, the toymaker's book-loving goddaughter (Chloë Grace Moretz).

Up to this point, we have every reason to expect that Hugo and Isabelle will be central to some grand adventure. The fiery demise of Hugo's father (Jude Law), shown in flashback, appears to be murder, while the mysterious automaton could be from an Indiana Jones yarn. But the grand revelation, when it comes in the middle of the film, isn't really about Hugo at all. Rather, it's that Kingsley's grumpy toy-maker is in fact pioneering director Georges Méliès. Isabelle and Hugo are therefore demoted from the heroes of their story to the filmmaker's awestruck students, as the film fills up with illustrated lectures and loving reconstructions of Méliès's fabulous career. The children's adventure amounts to reminding a genius of his own genius, with makeshift perils for Hugo tacked on in

the last reel. The airy resonances between Hugo's and Méliès's stories never convince; and while Hugo can certainly be seen as a cipher for Scorsese, and Hugo as a metaphor for the cinephile outsider, this does nothing to alleviate the film's prosaic shortcomings as a story.

There is, however, much pleasure to be had from *Hugo*'s performers, who make its melodrama and sentiment real – especially Kingsley as Méliès, playing the director-magician in the throes of a deep grief that the script never

articulates. There are vibrant colours and camera placings, gorgeously immersive 3D and an extraordinary sequence in which a runaway train ploughs through the length of Montparnasse. Hugo's deceptive story may introduce far more people to Méliès than any biopic or documentary, but this makes it no less a cheat. Many times, *Hugo*'s characters invoke cinema's magic and wonder; a pity the film's broken-backed narrative is such thin, self-reflecting glitter.

• Andrew Osmond

CREDITS

Produced by
Graham King
Tim Headington
Martin Scorsese
Johnny Depp
Screenplay
John Logan
Based on the book
entitled *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick

Director of Photography
Robert Richardson

Edited by
Thelma Schoonmaker
Production Designed by

Dante Ferretti

Music Composed, Orchestrated & Conducted by

Howard Shore

Sound Designer

Eugene Gearty

Costume Designer

Sandy Powell

Visual Effects by

Pixomondo

Lola VFX

Visual Effects/Digital Environments Created by

Uncharted Territory

Opening Shot by

Industrial Light and Magic

Stunt Co-ordinator

Doug Coleman

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Production Companies

Paramount Pictures and GK Films present a GK Films/Infinitum Nihil production

A Martin Scorsese picture

Executive Producers

Emma Tillinger Koskoff

David Crockett

Georgia Kacandes

Christi Dembrowski

Barbara DeFinia

Film Extracts

Le Voyage dans la lune/ A Trip to the Moon (1902)

Le Roi du maquillage/ The Untamable Whiskers (1904)

À la conquête du pôle/ Conquest of the Pole (1912)

Le Mélomane/ The Melomaniac (1903)

Le Royaume des fées/ Kingdom of the Fairies (1903)

Papillon fantastique/ The Spider and the Butterfly (1911)

La Fée Carabosse ou Le Poignard fatal/ The Witch (1906)

Les Illusions fantastiques/ Whimsical Illusions (1898)

Voyage à travers l'impossible/ Impossible Journey (1904)

Les Quatre Cents Farces du diable/ The Merry Frolics of Satan (1906)

Le Palais des mille et une nuits/ The Palace of a Thousand and One Nights (1905)

Faust aux enfers/ The Damnation of Faust (1903)

Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune/ The Eclipse: Courtship of the Sun and the Moon (1907)

Le Cake-walk infernal/ The Infernal Cake-walk (1903)

Le Raid Paris-Monte Carlo en deux heures/ Paris to Monte Carlo (1905)

Cendrillon/ Cinderella (1899)

La Libellule/ The Dragon Fly

Le Cauchemar/ A Nightmare (1895)

L'Homme à la tête en caoutchouc/ The Man

with the Exploding Head [aka *The Man with the India-rubber Head*] (1902)

Lisette

Christopher Lee

Monsieur Labisse

Helen McCrory

Mama Jeanne

Michael Stuhlbarg

Rene Tabard

Frances de la Tour

Madame Emile

Richard Griffiths

Monsieur Frick

Jude Law

Hugo's father

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS

Colour and Prints by

DeLuxe

1.85:1

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor

Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

1,331 ft +0 frames



Maggie mia: Jim Broadbent, Meryl Streep

The Iron Lady

United Kingdom/France 2011

Director: Phyllida Lloyd

Certificate 12A 104m 38s

In the opening shot of *The Iron Lady* an arthritic hand reaches for a pint of milk on a corner-shop shelf – immediately recalling the epithet 'Margaret Thatcher, milk snatcher' earned by the then education secretary after she abolished free milk for school kids. And when the elderly Thatcher heads for the counter, she's elbowed aside by a portly young suit braying into his mobile – precisely, one might think, the kind of insensitive boor bred by her 'there is no such thing as society' credo.

Leaving aside the unlikelihood that Baroness Thatcher, with all her staff and security guards, would be allowed to totter by herself down to the local corner shop for her groceries, this scene arouses expectations of a promisingly satirical edge. No such luck. Though it falls short of hagiography – and despite claims in the *Daily Telegraph* that the film constitutes some kind of malignant leftist smear on the glorious Thatcher era – what director Phyllida Lloyd

(*Mamma Mia!*) and screenwriter Abi Morgan (*Shame*, TV's *The Hour*) have given us is an affectionate and largely depoliticised account of the rise and fall of Britain's first female prime minister.

"The thing about the film," Lloyd has said, "is it's not about policy in any way. It's all told from her point of view."

Given that Thatcher, right or wrong, was nothing if not a conviction politician, the suggestion that her 'point of view' could for a moment exclude policy seems a touch bizarre. Still, the POV approach works well on occasion: Thatcher's first arrival in the House of Commons, a lone powder-blue-clad female amid a heaving mass of dark-suited males, finding herself directed to the 'Lady Members' Room' (a deserted, carpetless cubbyhole furnished with a sole upright chair and an ironing board), makes its point; this may not be exactly how it was, but it's easy to believe that's what it felt like.

Elsewhere, though, the subjective angle risks becoming tiresome. The film's central conceit – that the widowed Lady Thatcher, suffering the onset of dementia, still sees husband Denis (Jim Broadbent) and talks to him, to the puzzlement of her staff ("Did you say something, Lady Thatcher?") – would be amusing for five minutes or

SYNOPSIS London, present day. Baroness Margaret Thatcher, the former British prime minister, is now in her eighties and living in her house in Chester Square, looked after by her personal assistant June and her staff. Her daughter Carol visits her regularly. In the early stages of dementia, Margaret imagines that her husband Denis is still with her, though he's been dead for some years. June encourages her to clear out Denis's clothes and effects. Margaret recalls the war years when, as the young Margaret Roberts, she idolised her father, a grocer in Grantham, and won a scholarship to Oxford.

Margaret hosts a dinner party. She recalls putting herself forward as a Tory candidate and meeting a young businessman, Denis Thatcher. She loses the election, but afterwards Denis proposes. She stands again in 1959, for the safe seat of Finchley, and is elected. Despite male chauvinism she rises in the party and becomes education secretary. In 1975, having improved her image with the help of Airey Neave and Gordon Reece, she's chosen as party leader, and in 1979 becomes prime minister. Neave is killed by an IRA car bomb.

At Carol's urging, Margaret sees her doctor but rejects suggestions that she's losing touch. Denis reappears and Margaret tells him to leave her alone. As prime minister, Margaret is faced with civil unrest, the miners' strike and IRA bombs, one of which narrowly misses killing her at the Grand Hotel in Brighton. The Falklands War restores her popularity and she's re-elected in 1983. Her style of government becomes increasingly autocratic and, despite winning a third election in 1987, she faces opposition within her own party. Her obstinacy over the Poll Tax brings matters to a head, and in 1990 she's forced to resign.

At Chester Square, Margaret packs up Denis's effects and his ghost leaves her.

SYNOPSIS Paris, circa 1930. Hugo Cabret, an orphan, lives in the forgotten spaces of Montparnasse railway station, his sole companion the clockwork automaton that his late father found in a museum. Hugo is obsessed with getting the automaton working again, while avoiding the strict station inspector who sends all stray children to the orphanage.

Hugo is caught pilfering machine parts by Georges, the harsh owner of a toyshop at the station. Georges is impressed by Hugo's repairing skills, and lets the boy work at his shop. Hugo becomes friends with Georges's goddaughter Isabelle, and finds that she has a heart-shaped key (given to her by Georges's wife Jeanne) which fits the automaton.

Activated, the automaton draws a picture – of a rocket striking the moon in the face. The picture is signed 'Georges Méliès' – the toyshop owner's full name. With Jeanne's help, Hugo and Isabelle find a stash of fabulous drawings in Méliès's house. Méliès is distraught that the pictures have been unearthed. The children learn that he was once a successful film director. They screen a print of his sole remaining film, *A Trip to the Moon*. Méliès finally tells the children his story: his films fell out of fashion after the Great War, and his business collapsed.

Hugo realises that the automaton is Méliès's creation and rushes to the station to fetch it. He is waylaid by the station inspector, but Méliès intervenes, claiming Hugo as his son. Later, Méliès is recognised and honoured by the filmmaking profession, and many of his films are recovered.

so. Extended across the entire film, it soon outstays its welcome. And some rewriting of history verges on the farcical. When Airey Neave is blown up by an IRA car bomb, Thatcher, who's just been chatting to him, is rocked by the blast a mere hundred yards away and rushes weeping to the wrecked car – a cheesily melodramatic fabrication even Hollywood might balk at.

There are compensations. The scene where Thatcher, patiently schooled by Neave and Gordon Reece, modulates her Lincolnshire accent into the deep, condescending swoop of her later years, offers rich comedy, and we get some reliable cameos – not least Richard E. Grant's Michael Heseltine, prowling the room with wolfish grin as he scents the downfall of the Leaderene. And of course there's Meryl Streep, once again going far beyond mimicry into total identification with her role, taking Thatcher from the confident stride of her early triumphs to the stiff-legged shuffle of old age. But altogether this is a much softened and declawed portrait of the most divisive prime minister of recent times. Can 'Margaret Thatcher – The Musical' be far off?

♦ Philip Kemp

CREDITS

Produced by Damian Jones
Screenplay Abi Morgan
Director of Photography Elliot Davis
Editor Justin Wright
Production Designer Simon Elliott
Music by/Conductor Thomas Newman
Sound Designer Nigel Stone
Costume Designer Consolata Boyle

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Production Companies Pathé, Film4 and UK Film Council present with the participation of Canal+ and Cine+ in association with Goldcrest Film Production LLP a DJ Films production for Pathé, Film4, Goldcrest Film Production LLP and UK Film Council A Phyllida Lloyd film Made with the support of the National Lottery through the UK Film Council's Development Fund and Film Fund
Executive Producers François Ivernel, Cameron McCracken, Tessa Ross, Adam Kulick
Film Extracts *The King and I* (1956)

CAST

Meryl Streep Margaret Thatcher
Jim Broadbent Denis Thatcher
Olivia Colman Carol Thatcher
Roger Allam Gordon Reece
Susan Brown June, Margaret's aide

Jack and Jill

USA 2011

Director: Dennis Dugan
Certificate PG 90m 43s

One of the more amusing *Jack and Jill* jokes came outside the film itself, in the laughably indignant reviews that followed the film's American release. Despite being treated as the comedic equivalent of a war crime, the latest 'Adam Sandler movie' is your standard cross-dressing exercise with a star in a double role (cf. *Norbit*, *Tyler Perry*), and as such not appreciably worse than many of the reliably bankable star's previous films, much less the year's leading stinker.

Sandler stars both as Jack, LA adman and family man, and Jack's twin sister Jill, resolutely still 100 per cent a product of the Bronx. Jack hosts Jill for a Thanksgiving visit which goes on deep into December, thanks largely to bickering and complications centring on Jack's need to land Al Pacino for a big account and Pacino's unforeseen attraction to Jill. Pacino plays Pacino with gusto, head over heels for a fellow city kid who still has street games like stickball in her bones.

The Sandler-vs-Sandler film, flush with *SNL* alumni (Norm Macdonald, Tim Meadows, David Spade), celebrity cameos (Johnny Depp, Regis Philbin, Shaquille O'Neal) and Royal Caribbean-sponsored cruise sequence, admittedly has that minimum-sweat feel, but it's not an affirmation of Sandler's portrayal of a contemptuous rich comedian in *Funny People* (2009). Directed by Dennis Dugan, there's the potty humour and brattiness one has come to expect, plus a Mexican gardener who recites stereotypes only to parody them with an 'I'm keeding' catchphrase. But even if the character draws on Sandler's Gap Girl from *SNL* or silly voices from his comic recordings, Jill is an acceptable and naturally played stock figure, a tough but bruising girl from 'the good part of Throgs Neck' who sticks to her habits. And the theme of 'relatives make you crazy because deep down you're like them' remains durable.

Why is Jack's wife played by Katie Holmes? A satisfying and meaningful answer does not exist. But for the record, funny jokes in the film include Jill dismissing Pacino's grandiloquent



What a drag: Adam Sandler

crazy-man romancing as 'gross'; a child taping a pepper shaker to his forehead; and a goading crowd's 'Fight, fight, fight!' chant at a party segueing as necessary into 'Happy Birthday'.

♦ Nicolas Rapold

CREDITS

Produced by Adam Sandler, Jack Sadelstein, Jill Giarraputo, Todd Garner
Screenplay Steve Koren, Adam Sandler
Story Ben Zook
Director of Photography Dean Cundey
Editor Tom Costain
Production Designer Perry Andelin Blake
Music Rupert Gregson-Williams, Waddy Wachtel
Production Mixer Richard Kite
Costume Designer Ellen Lutter

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Production Companies Columbia Pictures presents a Happy Madison/Broken Road production

Executive Producers Barry Bernardi, Bettina Viviano, Allen Covert, Steve Koren, Robert Smigel, Tim Herlihy
Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]
Distributor Sony Pictures Releasing
8,164 ft + 8 frames

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, the present. At Thanksgiving, advertising director Jack Sadelstein and his family receive a visit from Jack's twin sister Jill, who now lives alone in the Bronx following their mother's death. At work Jack is told he must persuade Al Pacino to appear in a coffee commercial.

At Thanksgiving dinner, Jack and Jill are at loggerheads. Jill's attempts at dating during her visit go nowhere. But when Jack brings his sister to a basketball game where he hopes to talk to Pacino, the famous actor falls for Jill because of their shared Bronx origins.

Jill, who's overstaying her welcome with her brother, is put off by Pacino's fervour during a visit to his house. However, she enjoys herself at a barbecue given by the family of Jack's Mexican gardener Felipe. When Pacino asks Jack to secure his sister for him, Jack invites her along on a long-planned family cruise where Pacino will appear. Unable to persuade Jill to meet with Pacino, Jack dresses in drag to visit him. During the visit, Jack and Pacino get into a scrap, Pacino defends Jill, and Jack realises that he hasn't been a good brother. Jill meanwhile has gone home alone to celebrate New Year's Eve, which used to be a tradition with their mother. Jack and family pay a surprise visit, the twins reconcile after a fight with locals, and Felipe declares his love for Jill.

J. Edgar

USA 2011

Director: Clint Eastwood
Certificate 15 136m 44s

J. Edgar Hoover headed the Bureau of Investigation (the FBI after 1935) from 1924 to 1972, through eight presidencies – an extraordinary reign as America's top cop, secured through amassing dirty laundry belonging not only to proposed security threats but also to the intimates of each new administration. As presented in Clint Eastwood's new film, Hoover was a man with a genius for compartmentalisation and organisation – he takes his secretary Helen Gandy (Naomi Watts) on a farcical date to the Library of Congress to show off a card catalogue system that he's designed. Hoover's genius was honed by a lifetime of safely filing away the same socially scorned tendencies in himself that he delighted in uncovering in others in order to intimidate them. When Hoover (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his associate director Clyde Tolson (Armie Hammer) gigglingly read from letters between Eleanor Roosevelt and a lesbian paramour, the fact that these men also share a same-sex intimacy barely restrained from expression is an irony that occurs to neither.

J. Edgar is a collaboration between Dustin Lance Black, openly gay scriptwriter of *Milk* and LGBT activist, and Clint Eastwood, openly heterosexual, ambiguously Republican and eternally spurned in some sectors for appealing to the same sense of outraged justice – and Nixon's Silent Majority – as 'Dirty' Harry Callahan. Of course there were ambiguities even in Harry's 'reactionary' character, and Eastwood has always been too eccentric a figure to go lockstep with the times, to the point of inconsistency. Jack Cassidy's swish assassin in Eastwood's *The Eiger Sanction* was an antique stereotype when the film was made in 1975 – yet in 1984, what other red-blooded action star would let slip a line with bi-curious subtext ("Who says I haven't?"), as Eastwood did in *Tightrope*?

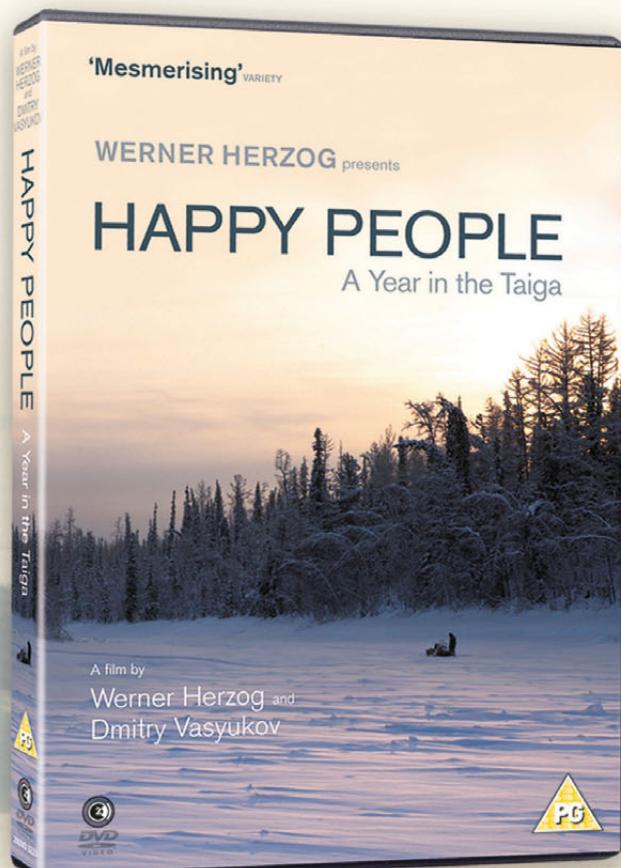
Hoover the extra-legal crusader is an analogous figure to Harry Callahan. From the cases of Emma Goldman to Martin Luther King Jr, whom Hoover suspects of communist sympathies, he is willing to bend or break the American law to protect his idea of the American way. (A crisper distinction between the Hoovers of 1919 and 1963 might have strengthened the sense of his idealistic rise and decadent decline, which the script assumes.) And surely something in the story of a man who unwaveringly upheld a mask before the public through a long career must have connected to Eastwood, he of the intensely obscure squint.

The saying goes, "If you keep making that face, it'll stay that way," and certainly the threat seems to have come true for DiCaprio, who's barely smiled on screen in the past decade. This makes him, counterintuitive as the casting may seem, a fine fit for Hoover, whom he plays from a young fussbudget with a Tommy-gun mouth to an old man

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Citizens vice bureau: Leonardo DiCaprio

whose only life-force is evidenced in cautious, fleetingly tender eyes. It is no small thing to act past make-up department jowls and to make something touching of, say, the scene where Hoover shells a breakfast egg for his infirm lifelong companion, but DiCaprio does.

J. Edgar whips between public and private worlds: cutaways to Charles Lindbergh in mid-flight and anarchist assassinations intervene, but we always return to Hoover's chartered life, delimited by the FBI facilities, the Washington DC townhouse where he is interred with his mother, played by Judi Dench ("I'd rather have a dead son than a live daffodil"), and the corner booth at Harvey's restaurant where he dines nightly with Tolson.

The period trappings are posh but effaced in the murk of compulsive

underlighting by Tom Stern, Eastwood's house cinematographer since 2002. The flashbacks are flashbulb bright, the flesh tones mortuary. The film, like Hoover, is defined by withholding, gnawing at Black and Eastwood's preoccupations rather than going for the meatiest bits on its subject's timeline. John Dillinger, who might have brought audience thrills, appears here only as a death-mask trophy, while Stephen Root's forensic wood expert, working the Lindbergh kidnapping case, has an expansive little part. It's a scattered film about a very disciplined man, but thanks to its seeming immunity from the pressure to be accessible or even likeable – Eastwood the legend is as untouchable as Hoover – *J. Edgar*'s faults as a 'well-made' biopic often seem like virtues.

● Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Produced by
Clint Eastwood
Brian Grazer
Robert Lorenz
Written by
Dustin Lance Black
Director of Photography
Tom Stern
Editors
Joe Cox
Gary D. Roach
Production Designed by
James J. Murakami
Music
Clint Eastwood

Supervising Sound Editors

Alan Robert Murray
Bob Asman
Costumes Designed by
Deborah Hopper
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Entertainment Inc.
Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents an Imagine Entertainment production
A Malpaso production

Executive Producers

Tim Moore
Erica Huggins
CAST
Leonardo DiCaprio
J. Edgar Hoover
Naomi Watts
Helen Gandy
Armie Hammer
Clyde Tolson
Josh Lucas
Charles Lindbergh
Judi Dench
Annie Hoover
Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS

Prints/Colour by

Technicolor
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros.
Distributors (UK)

12,306 ft +0 frames

The Lady

France/United Kingdom 2011

Director: Luc Besson

"Daddy, tell me a story," says little Suu Kyi to her father Aung San in the opening scene of Luc Besson's *The Lady*. It is 1947 and only hours before Aung San, the architect of Burma's independence movement, will be coldly assassinated along with his colleagues at a meeting of the Executive Council to discuss post-independence democracy. Aung San proceeds to spin his daughter (who would in fact have been just two years old at the time) the "sad story" – half fairytale, half colonial history – of Burma's Golden Age, when tigers and elephants reigned and rubies were "redder than your cheeks", before this idyll was brought to an end by British invasion, oppression and exploitation. Viewers are now primed to expect that this docudrama 'based on a true story' will show considerable creative licence in its telling.

As much an icon as a person, the adult Aung San Suu Kyi might seem the perfect fit for a heady mix of myth and history. Returning to Burma in 1988 after decades abroad, Suu Kyi (gracefully impersonated by Michelle Yeoh) was catapulted into the leadership of the opposition National League for Democracy more for her father's revered status than for any relevant experience in politics (she then admitted to having none), and spent 15 of the next 24 years under house arrest, sequestered from her party supporters, the public eye and even her own family. Recognising her symbolic value, the otherwise ruthlessly brutal generals of the ruling junta have kept her alive to ensure that she is not perceived as a martyr.

A committed adherent to Gandhi's principles of non-violent resistance, Suu Kyi has neither the killer instincts nor the adventurous pluck of Besson's fictive heroines Nikita and Adèle Blanc-Sec, nor the warrior status of his *Joan of Arc* (1999) – though there is one characteristic that she shares with the latter. "The world is united now in declaring you a saint," observes her husband Michael Aris (David Thewlis, who also plays Aris's twin brother Anthony) – and although Suu Kyi rejects sanctitude, insisting that every saint is also a sinner, her only stated fault is stubbornness, which in this context is no sin at all.

The very qualities that make Suu Kyi so laudable in real life make her a flatly passive character in cinema. *The Lady* focuses on the tensions between her political and personal life, as she remains in Burma even while her husband is dying of cancer in England and her two sons are growing up without her – but it never seriously entertains the idea that her choices might be the wrong ones. Meanwhile the generals are portrayed as pantomime villains (complete with cartoonishly inharmonious cues in Eric Serra's score). This may well reflect historical truth but it makes for unengaging drama. *The Lady* is a worthy but toothless affair, in need of tigers. ● Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Virginie Besson-Silla
Andy Harries
Original Screenplay
Rebecca Frayn
Director of Photography
Thierry Arbogast
Editor
Julien Rey
Production Designer
Hugues Tissandier
Original Music
Composed, Arranged and Produced by
Symphonic Parts
Conducted by
All Other Parts Performed by
Eric Serra
Sound
Didier Lozahic
Ken Yasumoto
Costume Designer
Olivier Beriot

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Production Companies
Europacorp presents a Europacorp, Left Bank Pictures, France 2 Cinéma co-production With the participation of Canal+, France Télévisions and CineCinéma
A film by Luc Besson
Film Extracts
Aung San Suu Kyi
Silence and Fear (1994)

Agga Poechit
Than Shwe
Donatienee Dupont
Marie-Laure Aris
Phone Zaw
Aung San, the father
Marian Yu
Daw Khin Kyi, the mother
May
Mon Mon

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled
Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

CAST

Michelle Yeoh
Aung San Suu Kyi
David Thewlis
Michael Aris/Anthony Aris
Jonathan Raggett
Kim Aris
Jonathan Woodhouse
Alexander Aris
Susan Wooldridge
Lucinda Phillips
Benedict Wong
Karma
U Htun Lin
General Ne Win

SYNOPSIS Rangoon, 1947. Burmese independence architect Aung San is assassinated. In 1988, his daughter Aung San Suu Kyi leaves her husband Michael Aris and two sons in Oxford while she returns to Burma, ostensibly for a week or two, to visit her ailing mother. Witnessing the ruling junta's brutality, Suu Kyi agrees to lead the National League for Democracy, and begins campaigning, joined by her family until Michael is expelled. The junta places Suu Kyi under house arrest, imprisons her colleagues, impedes every attempt by her family to visit, and ignores her party's massive majority in the 1990 elections. Michael continues agitating from Britain, leading to Suu Kyi's Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 (awarded in absentia) and her temporary release from house arrest in 1995. In 1998, Michael is diagnosed with terminal cancer, but is repeatedly refused a visa to Burma; with his consent, Suu Kyi declines to visit him in case she is refused re-entry to Burma. Michael dies in 1999. In 2007, though still under house arrest, Suu Kyi appears at her gate before a cheering crowd of pro-democracy monks.

SYNOPSIS Washington DC, 1963. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover is preparing to wiretap Martin Luther King Jr's hotel room. Under fire from Attorney General Robert Kennedy, he decides to dictate his memoirs.

In 1919, the 24-year-old Hoover witnesses an anarchist bombing on the home of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Hoover participates in a wave of retributive government strikes and begins his rapid advancement within the Justice Department. Further flashbacks show stages in his rise to power, including a PR campaign promoting the all-American FBI 'G-man' and a successful conviction in the Lindbergh kidnapping case. There are also glimpses of Hoover's relationships with his ailing though still commanding mother, secretary Helen Gandy and FBI Associate Director Clyde Tolson, with whom he has a longstanding, apparently unconsummated love affair.

Hoover's reign at the FBI ends with his death in 1972. Gandy destroys Hoover's files to keep them out of the hands of President Richard Nixon.



Border control: Anton Yelchin, Felicity Jones

Like Crazy

USA 2011

Director: Drake Doremus
Certificate 12A 89m 57s

Anyone who's ever been in a long-distance relationship will recognise the bittersweet struggles at the centre of Drake Doremus's *Like Crazy*: the long waits for phone calls that don't come; the heady anticipation, inevitable anticlimax and weepy weekends' endings. Indeed, what makes Doremus's tale of youthful ardour so unusual is, paradoxically, the very ordinariness of its central couple and their sad situation.

When students Anna and Jacob go on their first date, there's no edgy, eccentric repartee to their conversation: the revelation that the pair share a taste for coffee and Paul Simon's *Graceland* is hardly the stuff of soulmates colliding. The poem Anna writes for her soon-to-be lover and the chair Jacob carves for her with the words 'Like Crazy' are both, to borrow Anna's words, "a bit childish". Likewise, when visa issues prevent Anna, a Brit, from remaining in LA after graduation, the odds are hardly insurmountable; it's more telling that Jacob refuses to sacrifice his burgeoning career to join her in the UK. As he shuttles between the two countries, the couple attempt to glue together the pieces of their fractured relationship, endlessly declaring "I love you" or "I'm sorry", even as the easy, innocent passion of the early days recedes ever further into the distance.

Much of the credit for the film's delicate banality must go to Felicity Jones and Anton Yelchin, improvising on the basis of a 50-page outline written by Doremus and Ben York Jones. They are lent support by Oliver Muirhead and Alex Kingston as Anna's gloriously middle-class parents, as well as Charlie Bewley and a luminous – if fleetingly glimpsed – Jennifer Lawrence as a matched pair of more conveniently located alternative love interests.

But it's John Guleserian's cinematography that enables audiences to invest in Anna and Jacob's relationship. Framing the pair in tight, soft-edged close-up, the camera gives us a world in which nothing beyond them

truly exists: separate and apart, Anna and Jacob are presented as pools of stillness against a blurred, buzzing and impalpable background. At parties and in pubs, conversations fade and become muffled as they exchange texts across the Atlantic, for a moment their whole world contained in 140 characters or fewer. Meanwhile Jonathan Alberts's Godard-inspired editing compresses an entire summer into seconds and extends the briefest of touches for what seems like hours. Theirs may be the story of so many love affairs, but cast and crew conspire to convey how for Anna and Jacob – twenty-something and with the world at their feet – it's utterly unique, and completely engulfing.

There are some missteps, not least of which is the addition of a sickly-sweet soundtrack that's both overbearing and unnecessary. In a film so tightly bound up with mobile communications, one

CREDITS

Producers
Jonathan Schwartz
Andrea Sperling
Written by
Drake Doremus
Ben York Jones
Director of
Photography
John Guleserian
Edited by
Jonathan Alberts
Production Designer
Katie Byron
Music
Dustin O'Halloran
Sound Designer
Andy Hay
Costume Designer

Mari Chisholm

©[TBC]
Production
Companies
Paramount Vantage and
Indian Paintbrush
present a Super Crispy
Entertainment,
Jonathan
Schwartz/Andrea
Sperling production
A Drake Doremus
Executive Producers
Zygi Wilf
Audrey Wilf
Steven Rales
Mark Roybal

also can't help but wonder about the absence of Facebook. It's not easy to ignore the one-night stands and substitute lovers when their presence has been documented daily in photographs and wall posts; as it is, the spectre of Jacob's interim girlfriend Sam is a haunting enough presence in the apartment where the couple conduct an uncomfortable reunion at the film's close. The ambiguous ending leaves it unclear as to whether we are witnessing a tentative rapprochement or the dying throes of a relationship that's been strung out too long, over too great a distance. But at least one of these characters has learnt that however brightly it burns, love all too often sputters and fades: life gets in the way, and then goes on. And rarely is it a great tragedy, just another affair that has sadly come to its end.

♦ Catherine Wheatley

CAST

Anton Yelchin
Jacob
Felicity Jones
Anna
Jennifer Lawrence
Sam
Charlie Bewley
Simon
Alex Kingston
Jackie
Oliver Muirhead
Bernard
Finola Hughes
Liz
Chris Messina
Mike Appletree
Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK
8,095 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, the present. Two students – Anna, an aspiring journalist, and Jacob, who is training to be a furniture designer – begin a relationship. After graduation, Anna, who is British, decides to overstay her visa to remain with Jacob. When she attempts to return to the US after a visit home, she is refused entry. Attempts to overturn the decision end in failure. In the meantime, Jacob's furniture business flourishes; despite Anna's pleas, he refuses to abandon it in order to move to England. The couple split.

As the months pass neither is able to move on, and a late-night phone call results in Jacob visiting Anna – now a junior contributor to a successful magazine – in the UK. Anna's father raises the idea of marriage but the pair refuse to discuss it. Realising that they can't sustain a long-distance relationship, they part once more.

Jacob begins a new relationship with Sam, his assistant, but when Anna phones to propose marriage he breaks the relationship off and returns to England. He and Anna wed. Despite their legal union, however, the ban on Anna's US immigration status remains. Jacob returns to the US and to Sam.

Later, Anna has just split with new boyfriend Simon when she receives a phone call to inform her the ban has been lifted. She calls Jacob, who asks Sam to move out of the apartment they have been sharing. He collects Anna from the airport and brings her home, where they share an awkward, passionless embrace.

Man on a Ledge

USA 2011

Director: Asger Leth

Certificate 12A 102m 16s

In his 2007 docu-fantasia *My Winnipeg*, Guy Maddin recalled a preposterous TV soap of his childhood called *Ledge Man*. Each week the suicidal hero would be encouraged to come down off his window ledge, only to be back there again threatening to jump the following week. Asger Leth's mainstream debut (his previous film, 2006's *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, was a documentary about slum gangs in Haiti) is not, as it turns out, a big-screen outing for this obscure show, though happily it is almost as daft.

After a solitary dinner with an ominous sense of finality, Nick Cassidy (Sam Worthington) steps out of the window of his hotel room and on to the outside ledge, where he stands contemplating the long drop to the streets below. Good-looking and self-assured, Nick doesn't seem quite the suicide, and sure enough, flashbacks soon reveal that he is an ex-policeman, wrongly imprisoned for a jewel theft, who has made a jailbreak with the help of his brother Joey (Jamie Bell). Together they've cooked up an elaborate decoy plot to keep the New York cops distracted while Joey pulls off a diamond heist a block away that should clear Nick's name.

Shot by Paul Cameron, the go-to cinematographer for sleek urban thrillers (*Man on Fire*, *Collateral*), *Man on a Ledge* makes disappointingly little of the vertiginous heights from which Nick orchestrates his shot at freedom. Nor does the hi-tech break-in offer much fizz. It's the sidewalk circus that seems to interest Leth the most. As Nick plays out his phony crisis for time, the street quickly becomes a pandemonium of press, NYPD and cynical lingerers hoping to witness a jump. It's all very *Dog Day Afternoon*, the likeness being made explicit when one pedestrian, tipping the hat to Al Pacino's rallying cry in Sidney Lumet's 1975 film, anachronistically chants "Attica!"

Unfortunately, Leth's film plays out on an altogether different plain of credibility to Lumet's bungled-robbbery classic. It's difficult to accept that Nick would go to such convoluted lengths to prove that Ed Harris's dastardly businessman framed him, or that a suicidal red herring is really enough to keep the whole New York police department busy while a diamond caper is pulled off around the corner. As Nick whispers stage-right asides to his brother via a concealed microphone on his lapel, under the nose of beautiful suicide negotiator Lydia Anderson (Elizabeth Banks), the movie teeters precariously on the edge of credibility. That *Man on a Ledge* keeps its footing and remains entertainingly silly rather than merely ridiculous is down to Worthington, an Australian actor with a background in action who makes the most of a uniquely stationary hero role. ♦ Samuel Wigley

CREDITS

Produced by

Lorenzo di Bonaventura

Mark Vahradian

Written by

Pablo F. Fenjves

Director of

Photography

Paul Cameron

Editor

Kevin Stitt

Production Designer

Alec Hammond

Music

Henry Jackman

Production Mixer

-??

Costume Designer

Susan Lyall

©[TBC]

Production

Companies

Summit Entertainment presents a di Bonaventura Pictures production

Executive Producers

Jake Myers
David Ready

CAST

Sam Worthington

Nick Cassidy

Elizabeth Banks

Lydia Mercer

Jamie Bell

Joey Cassidy

Anthony Mackie

Mike Ackerman

Ed Burns

Jack Doughtery

Genesis Rodriguez

Angie

Kyra Sedgwick

Suzie Morales

Ed Harris
David Englander

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

9,204 ft +0 frames

Margaret

USA 2008

Director: Kenneth Lonergan
Certificate 15 149m 41s

During one of the blistering wars of words that are *Margaret's* lifeblood, a character issues the sour reprimand: "Don't handle me." Perhaps no film in recent memory can claim to have been 'handled' more than Kenneth Lonergan's long-delayed, much tinkered-with New York saga, which at last emerges following a traumatic six years of about-turns, back-and-forth lawsuits and protracted surgery from a queue of edit doctors. The version that now sees the light of day, pruned to a studio-stipulated 150 minutes after a final polish by Martin Scorsese and Thelma Schoonmaker, is as electrifying as it is occasionally wearying.

Shot in 2005, *Margaret* is a palpable artefact of Bush-era America, its study of thwarted ideals and fateful solipsism unfolding in a city still in gradual recovery from epochal tragedy. From the arresting opening shots of packed throngs of Manhattanites strolling in ultra slow motion, the air is fraught, the tone brittle. Soon enough, Upper West Side teenager Lisa Cohen (Anna Paquin) playfully distracts a bus driver (Mark Ruffalo) to such an extent that he skips a red light and runs over a pedestrian. In a painfully vivid sequence, the woman dies in Lisa's arms; confused and feeling pangs of responsibility, Lisa lies to the police that the light was green, absolving the driver – who sheepishly reaffirms her statement – of blame. Lonergan proceeds from this tortuous poser (who exactly is culpable?) by giving Lisa a burning interior conflict that has ultimately far-reaching consequences. Her gnawing urge to talk about the accident's ramifications is kept frustratingly unfulfilled: her single mother Joan (an excellent J. Smith-Cameron), a stage actress, is too busy with her imminent Broadway opening; her preoccupied father relays vague advice down the phone from California. The most attentive listener is Matt Damon's sincere but naive geometry teacher, with whom Lisa ill-advisedly begins a flirtation.

Brilliantly played by Paquin, Lisa is a terrific, maddening creation – prickly and defensive, headstrong but vulnerable. When she tries to find someone, or something, to blame for the accident beside herself, her misguided idealism takes a battering from the grey moral compromises of adult reality. "I don't want to make this my own moral gymnasium," she says, quoting Bernard Shaw. As written by Lonergan, it's an assault course. The elusiveness of doing the right thing equally suffused Lonergan's debut *You Can Count on Me* (2000), but compared with that film's subtle evasions, *Margaret* is unapologetically bold. The messy, prolonged rows between people blue in the face from being misunderstood or failing to communicate recall Cassavetes, but there's a heightened, sometimes theatrical quality to Lonergan's bracing dialogue. Opera



Teen spirit: Anna Paquin

and literature are knowingly alluded to. *Margaret's* title derives from Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem 'Spring and Fall' (recited, along with pointed excerpts from *King Lear*, by Matthew Broderick's English professor), detailing a girl's loss of innocence when faced with grief and the darkness in the world at large. It's a rather blunt literary proxy for Lisa, but it might also double for New York itself post-2001. A potent sense of performance lingers: glimpses of Joan's stage career; Lisa's acrimonious school debates where students scream at each other about 9/11 and Afghanistan; Joan's numerous opera visits with her would-be suitor Ramon (Jean Reno).

● **Matthew Taylor**

Margaret's most extraordinary scene – a tearful reconciliation during a performance of *The Tales of Hoffmann* – might easily have been risibly phoney, but I found it totally apposite to the film's singular dramatic register. There are intermittent signs of production travails – certain scenes are a little broken-backed or overly baggy, subplots can feel half-developed, and some characters seem to have lost major screen time (Damon especially). Nevertheless, in its present form, Lonergan's magnum opus is an engrossing sprawl – a resonant work of novelistic breadth and often scalding power.

CREDITS

Produced by

Sydney Pollack

Gary Gilbert

Scott Rudin

Written by

Kenneth Lonergan

Director of

Photography

Ryszard Lenczewski

Edited by

Anne McCabe

Michael Fay

Production Designer

Dan Leigh

Music

Nico Muhly

Production Sound

Mixer

Michael Barovsky

Costume Designer

Melissa Toth

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Margin Call

USA 2011

Director: J.C. Chandor

Anyone who's seen Charles Ferguson's scathing documentary *Inside Job* (2010), or who's been following the catastrophic financial debacle of the last few years, probably won't learn anything new from *Margin Call*. But in his feature debut, writer-director J.C. Chandor convincingly and grippingly dramatises the moment in 2008 when the whole ramshackle, greed-fuelled structure started to shudder and collapse. The story's real-life reference point is the meltdown of Lehman Brothers – the film's fictitious firm is headed by CEO John Tuld (a vulpine Jeremy Irons, visibly enjoying himself), a name closely echoing that of Lehman's rebarbative boss Dick Fuld.

In the film's key scene, Peter Sullivan (Zachary Quinto), the young risk assessor who sounds the alarm, is summoned in the small hours to present his findings to the company's hastily assembled board – including Tuld who, like Burt Lancaster in Bill Forsyth's *Local Hero* (1983), descends god-like by helicopter from the skies. "Just speak to me in plain English," he says. (A running gag of the film is that few of these 'masters of high finance' understand the first thing about what they've been doing.) Then, once it's been explained to him, he makes the 'margin call', giving the order to sell every scrap of the worthless junk that threatens to drag the company down. "But John," protests Kevin Spacey's Sam Rogers, the only character with anything approaching a conscience, "you're selling something that you know has no value." "We are selling to willing buyers at the current fair market price," retorts Tuld, "so that we may survive!"

Echoes abound here, and not just of Lehman Brothers; it's well known that Goldman Sachs (which *has* survived, and is doing very nicely, thanks) sold its clients' investments on whose failure it then bet quite profitably. Chandor creates a hard, shiny world of glass and steel, of vast black faceless towers rearing arrogantly



Boiler room: Paul Bettany

up into the Manhattan sky – a brutal spatial geography that enhances the bankers' amoral sense of us and them. "They do not lose money," explains Peter's immediate superior Will Emerson (Paul Bettany) about their employers, "but they don't mind if anybody else does." Tuld, persuading Sam not to quit, puts it even more starkly: "There have always been and there always will be the same percentage of winners and losers... fat cats and starving dogs in this world. Yeah, there may be more of us today than there's ever been. But the percentages – they stay exactly the same."

Here and there Chandor over-spices the mix. A speech in which the sacked Eric Dale (Stanley Tucci) recalls his previous life constructing bridges goes on way longer than necessary to make its point, though Tucci delivers it flawlessly. And the bookending subplot about Sam's dying dog is a rather too

SYNOPSIS Manhattan, 2008. With the markets shaky, staff at a major Wall Street investment bank are being fired, among them senior risk manager Eric Dale. As he's escorted from the building he hands a memory stick to his young protégé, Peter Sullivan, telling him to look at its contents. That night Peter looks at Eric's data and is horrified. He summons his colleague Seth Bregman and his immediate boss Will Emerson to see what he's found. Equally alarmed, they call in Will's boss Sam Rogers (who's tending his dying dog), who in turn calls his superior Jared Cohen. Cohen tells Peter and Seth to track down Eric, but they can't find him. A meeting of the board, including Sarah Robertson, the company's most senior female executive, is convened. CEO John Tuld arrives by helicopter.

Peter explains to the board that the firm is holding mortgage-based assets whose value is rapidly dropping, and that the losses on them will soon exceed the firm's entire market capitalisation. Tuld makes a snap decision: the next day the firm's traders will sell all the toxic stocks for the best price they can get. Sam objects that they'll be cheating their own clients but Tuld brushes his objections aside. Eric is located and offered a large sum of money to come back and help; he at first demurs but finally accepts. Tuld tells Sarah that she's the designated fall guy.

Trading opens and throughout the day the firm unloads all its mortgage-based assets. At the end of the day Sam calls together the traders, congratulates them and tells them most of them will lose their jobs. Seth is one of those who will be let go, but Tuld makes sure that Peter is kept on. Sam tells Tuld that he wants to quit but is persuaded to stay. That night, Sam buries his dog on his ex-wife's lawn.

Mission Impossible Ghost Protocol

USA 2011

Director: Brad Bird

Apart from Lalo Schifrin's immortal theme tune and the presence of Tom Cruise, very little links the four *Mission: Impossible* movies. The first two, directed by Brian De Palma (1996) and John Woo (2000) respectively, are a particularly odd couple; and though the two subsequent entries, directed by J.J. Abrams (2006) and now Brad Bird, have more in common – Abrams has stayed on as producer – there's no mythology, no recurring villain, no base, no M, Q or Felix Leiter, and it's not as if Cruise's Ethan Hunt is much of a character to begin with. A lot rests on the theme then, and Woo's nu-metal farfago even managed to muck that up. *Ghost Protocol* never sinks to the second instalment's level, but while the score is in safe hands with Michael Giacchino, and one set piece is among the best in the series, someone behind the scenes has introduced two misguided and somewhat contradictory ideas: splattering the script with terrible jokes, and giving Hunt and his team a poor semblance of human attributes.

The plot can be recited in five seconds: a bad guy wants to launch a nuke, and Hunt's Impossible Missions Force has to stop him getting what he needs to do it. Simon Pegg, promoted from his small role as a techie in the third film, is now a fully fledged IMF field agent, going out on missions and providing god-awful wisecracks – often about the novelty of being out in the field – that dampen the suspense without any compensation in chuckles. On one occasion, after a particularly close shave, he actually dusts off the line "I think that went quite well."

Pegg got away with it in *Star Trek* (2009), but not opposite Tom Cruise, who isn't known for his comic gifts. There were rumours that Jeremy Renner's casting in *Ghost Protocol*, as well as the non-numerical title, signalled the end of the Cruise era; but as he approaches his sixth decade, Cruise shows no sign of hanging it up. At the end of the movie he exchanges longing glances with his estranged wife (Michelle Monaghan) – introduced in *M:I III* but swiftly abandoned as a liability – before turning heel and accepting another mission.

After four movies Hunt is still a blank, and whatever the scene is reaching for remains ungrasped. Renner, meanwhile, has since been cast as the lead in the next *Bourne* movie, and one gets the sense that, like every supporting cast member except Pegg and Ving Rhames, who like Monaghan appears for just a few seconds, he's not long for this franchise. More than any previous *Mission: Impossible* film, *Ghost Protocol* distinguishes itself by its emphasis on teamwork, and while this is the cause of Pegg's unfortunate promotion,

blatant attempt to press the pathos pedal – hey look, some of these guys are human after all! But overall, as a vision of what happened when the first few loose pebbles of the current worldwide disaster slid inexorably towards an avalanche – and why – *Margin Call* is all too horribly plausible.

Philip Kemp

CREDITS

Produced by

Michael Benaroya
Neal Dodson
Zachary Quinto

Robert Ogden Barnum
Corey Moosa

Producer

Joe Jenkins

Written by

J.C. Chandor

Director of

Photography

Frank G. DeMarco

Editor

Peter Beaudreau

Production Designer

John Paine

Original Music

Nathan Larson

Production Sound

Mixer

Tim Elder

Costume Designer

Caroline Duncan

©Margin Call

Productions LLC

Production

Companies

Myriad Pictures and Benaroya Pictures present a Before the Door production in association with Washington Square Films, Sakonnet Capital Partners and Untitled Entertainment

Executive Producers

Cassian Elwes

Laura Rister

Joshua Blum

Kirk D'Amico

Randy Maris

Anthony Gudas

Michael Corso

Rose Ganguzza

CAST

Kevin Spacey

Sam Rogers

Paul Bettany

Will Emerson

Jeremy Irons

John Tuld

Zachary Quinto

Peter Sullivan

Penn Badgley

Seth Bregman

Simon Baker

Jared Cohen

Mary McDonnell

Mary Rogers

Demi Moore

Sarah Robertson

Stanley Tucci

Eric Dale

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Stealth Media Group



From russia with gloves: Simon Pegg, Tom Cruise

it also makes for some elaborate action sequences, involving crosscutting between three or more parallel strands. Editor Paul Hirsch, whose numerous collaborations with De Palma include the first *Mission: Impossible*, deserves credit for much of the film's success. Its highlight is an extended episode in and around the towering Burj Khalifa hotel in Dubai, which involves Hunt swinging around the building a hundred storeys up, an encroaching sandstorm and 'the old switcheroo'.

CREDITS

Produced by
Tom Cruise
JJ. Abrams
Bryan Burk
Written by
Josh Appelbaum
André Nemec
Christopher McQuarrie
Based on the television series created by Bruce Geller
Director of Photography
Robert Elswit
Editor
Paul Hirsch
Production Designer
Jim Bissell
Music
Michael Giacchino

Sound Designer

Gary Rydstrom
Costume Designer
Michael Kaplan
Stunt Co-ordinator
Grieg Smrz

©[TBC]

Production Companies

Paramount Pictures and Skydance Productions present a Tom Cruise/Bad Robot production
A Brad Bird film
Executive Producers
Jeffrey Chernov
David Ellison
Music
Dana Goldberg

The second principal set piece, in Mumbai, is slightly marred by incomprehensibility; moreover, whereas *M:I III* had Philip Seymour Hoffman at his nastiest, *Ghost Protocol's* 'Cobalt' (Michael Nyqvist) is a colourless creation despite his name. Léa Seydoux, on the other hand, the villain of the Dubai sequence, a well-presented but deadly assassin who is paid only in diamonds, is the movie's saving grace, playing with just the right amount of tongue in cheek.

◆ Henry K Miller

CAST

Tom Cruise
Ethan Hunt
Jeremy Renner
William Brandt
Simon Pegg
Benji Dunn
Paula Patton
Jane Carter
Michael Nyqvist
Kurt Hendricks
Vladimir Mashkov
Anatoly Sidirov
Josh Holloway
Trevor Hanaway
Anil Kapoor
Brij Nath
Léa Seydoux
Sabine Moreau
Tom Wilkinson
IMF secretary

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

Mother and Child

USA 2009

Director: Rodrigo García

Certificate: 15 126m 24s

Centred on several generations of women linked in some way through a Los Angeles adoption agency, Rodrigo García's *Mother and Child* reveals the underlying religious conservatism of the Haggis/Íñárritu-style we-are-all-connected template which defines Hollywood's liberal take on globalisation.

Karen and Elizabeth, mother and daughter, are the central protagonists. Even though they never meet – Karen was 14 when she gave her baby up – they are 'connected' by the same Catholic adoption agency that will eventually place Elizabeth's daughter with Karen's neighbour Lucy, whose relationship with pregnant 20-year-old Ray and desire for a baby of her own provides the film's subplot. The characters live in a Benetton version of LA, where they interact in colour-blind fashion – Karen (Annette Bening) and Elizabeth (Naomi Watts) are white, Lucy (Kerry Washington) is African-American. But while it's ostensibly liberal, the film reproduces and even condones racist stereotypes: Elizabeth refers to her much older African-American boss Paul (Samuel L. Jackson) as "good boy" during a sex scene, employing the language of the plantation; later, Paul and his family offer her a *Cosby Show* vision of warmth and paternalism. Similarly Karen learns valuable life lessons from her Latina housekeeper Ada, and from Latino colleague Paco and his deeply Christian daughter Maria. Sensitive, intuitive, simple and closer to God: these secondary characters, while well acted (particularly in the case of S. Epatha Merkerson as Ada and Shareeka Epps as Ray), ring unwelcome changes on the tradition of the 'magical negro', offering a vision in which historical injustices and asymmetries are outweighed by the separation of a mother and child.

At no point does the film critique the institution that victimises the women: the Catholic Church. Instead it offers a clear anti-abortion message when Elizabeth's obstetrician unprofessionally – and unbelievably – offers her an uninvited appointment to 'sort it out', prompting Elizabeth to fly into an out-of-character furniture-flattening rage.

As in *Juno* and *Knocked Up*, antediluvian – that is, sentimental, Victorian – attitudes to abortion persist here, underlined by an unwarranted plot point that serves merely to punish Karen (for having sex and giving up her daughter) and Elizabeth (for being sexual, independent and anti-family, refusing Paul's paternal offer to marry her and promote her) while positioning Lucy as a mammy to Ella, caring for her on Karen's behalf as Ada cares for Karen's ailing mother. Not just adoption then, but being a mother or a daughter is shown as a zero-sum game in this gallingly conservative entry into America's 'mommy wars'.

◆ Sophie Mayer

CREDITS

Produced by

Lisa Marie Falcone

Written by

Rodrigo García

Director of Photography

Xavier Pérez Grobet

Editor

Steven Weisberg

Production Designer

Christopher Tandon

Music

Edward Shearmur

Sound Mixer

Peter Devlin

Costume Designer

Susie DeSanto

©Mother and Child Productions, LLC

Production Companies

Sony Pictures Classics

in association with

Everest Entertainment

present a Mockingbird

Pictures production

Executive Producers

Alejandro González

Íñárritu

CAST

Naomi Watts

Elizabeth

Annette Bening

Karen

Kerry Washington

Lucy

Jimmy Smits

Paco

Samuel L. Jackson

Paul

S. Epatha Merkerson

Ada

Cherry Jones

Sister Joanne

Elpidia Carrillo

Sofia

Shareeka Epps

Ray

Alexandria Salling

Karen (age 14)

Connor Kramme

Tom (age 14)

David Ramsey

Joseph

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

Verve Pictures Ltd

11,376 ft +9 frames

SYNOPSIS The Impossible Missions Force breaks agent Ethan Hunt out of a Moscow jail (where he has been incarcerated for killing his wife's murderers) to track down Kurt Hendricks, aka 'Cobalt', a rogue Russian nuclear physicist who wants to cleanse the world of humanity by provoking Armageddon. Hendricks steals information from the Kremlin before blowing it up and pinning the attack on the IMF, an act that leads the US and Russia to the brink of war. Disavowed by the US government, and with Russian state security in hot pursuit, Hunt's team, augmented by Brandt, an analyst from IMF headquarters, travels to Dubai to stop Hendricks obtaining nuclear launch codes from contract killer Sabine Moreau. The mission, which involves impersonating both, ends with Hendricks obtaining the codes.

Hunt uses a contact of Bogdan, a friend he took with him in the jailbreak, to find out how Hendricks plans to cut into the Russian navy's communications network. On his advice, the team travels to Mumbai, where Hendricks, having bought a decommissioned satellite, is able to launch a Russian ICBM from a submarine under the Pacific. The team disarms the missile's warhead remotely just before it hits San Francisco; in the process Hunt kills Hendricks. The IMF is reconstituted but Brandt is reluctant to re-enlist: it had been his mission to protect Hunt's wife, and after his failure he left the field. Hunt reveals that he faked his wife's death to protect her, and Brandt signs up.

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, the present. As a pregnant teenager in the 1960s, Karen gave up her baby for adoption. She is now a successful physiotherapist. Elizabeth, the child she gave up, is a lawyer who has distanced herself from her adoptive family. Both women are embittered by their experience of separation. Karen resents her own mother, who is dying, while Elizabeth idolises the mother she's never known. Emotionally detached, Elizabeth enjoys casual sex with multiple partners, including her married neighbour and her much older boss, Paul, recently widowed.

Elizabeth is shocked to find herself pregnant but decides to have the baby. She leaves Paul's firm without telling him she's pregnant, and takes a job with another company; when Paul finds her and offers to marry her, she turns him down. She opts for a natural delivery despite complications to her pregnancy, and dies shortly after the birth. Her child, a daughter, is adopted by Lucy, whose previous attempt to adopt fell through when pregnant 20-year-old Ray decided to keep her baby. Lucy's husband leaves her because he wants his own biological child; however, Lucy's mother helps her to raise the child, Ella.

Before going into labour, Elizabeth had written an open letter to her mother, to be delivered by the Catholic adoption agency that placed her. Sister Joanne, the nun who found Elizabeth her adoptive family and also placed Ella with Lucy, makes the connection to Karen. Karen, emotionally open after the death of her mother and her relationship with her new husband Paco, meets Lucy and Ella, who turn out to be her near neighbours.

New Year's Eve

USA 2011

Director: Garry Marshall
Certificate 12A 117m 46s

Anyone who's seen *Valentine's Day* (2010) will know what to expect from director Garry Marshall and writer Katherine Fugate: a multiple-strand narrative, loaded with romantic expectations and set on a calendar date. On New Year's Eve, most New Yorkers are wondering who they'll be kissing at midnight – but the fact that some of the characters here have greater concerns gives the film a little more depth than its predecessor.

Amid a distractingly starry cast, Robert De Niro is a standout as Stan, a dying cancer patient who simply wants to see the famous Times Square Ball Drop before he passes. "Is he going to make it through the night?" "Doubtful," goes the doctor-nurse conversation, just so we are in no doubt as to Stan's own ticking clock. Despite the crude exposition, De Niro adds poignancy and gravitas in his few tender scenes with nurse Aimee (Halle Berry). Elsewhere the most memorable performances are against type: Zac Efron as a cocky cycle courier and Michelle Pfeiffer as a frumpy, put-upon employee (admittedly reminiscent of her *Batman Returns* role).

Other performances are too brief to impact, and many characters specialise in platitudes: audiences may suffer from advice-overload after a monologue from Times Square Ball Drop boss Claire (Hilary Swank) about the need to stop and think about life. Actually a public statement in response to a technical fault, her speech immediately calms the impatient crowd, pushing misty-eyed fantasies about community and bonding too far.

As with *Valentine's Day*, several ethnic characters exaggerate their accents and behaviour for intended comic effect (randy, hyperactive sous chef Ava is basically Speedy Gonzales with breasts). Realism occasionally enters the fray in a storyline about 15-year-old Hailey and her protective mother Kim (Sarah Jessica Parker), but it's quickly abandoned in favour of wish-fulfilment: missed opportunities become new ones, kisses are delivered at the 11th hour and high-risk romantic gestures pay off. In classic cyclical style, death is swiftly replaced by birth – though a plotline about two pregnant couples trying to win a prize for having the first baby of the new year seems incongruously cynical and, like much of the film, insufficiently amusing.

New Year's Eve certainly has a handle on the concerns of many an archetype (the young, the overworked, the single, the dying), but it fails to imbue most of them with anything other than superficial emotion in the limited time available. Nor does it seem particularly to care. With its recipe of universal themes, wise words, romantic moments and familiar faces, *New Year's Eve* is a wilfully sweet confection – it just depends how much sugar you can take.

Anna Smith

CREDITS

Produced by

Mike Karz

Wayne Rice

Garry Marshall

Written by

Katherine Fugate

Director of

Photography

Charles Minsky

Edited by

Michael Tronick

Production Designer

Mark Friedberg

Music

John Debney

Production Sound

Mixer

Tom Nelson

Costumes Designed by

Gary Jones

©Warner Bros.

Entertainment Inc.

Production Companies

A New Line Cinema presentation

A Wayne Rice/Karz

Entertainment production

A Garry Marshall film

Filmed with the support of

the New York State

Governor's Office for

Motion Picture &

Television Development

Executive Producers

Toby Emmerich

Samuel J. Brown

Michael Disco

Diana Pokorny

Josie Rosen

CAST

Halle Berry

nurse Aimee

Jessica Biel

Tess Byrne

Jon Bon Jovi

Jensen

SYNOPSIS New York, 31 December 2011. Many characters' stories interweave in the run-up to midnight.

While Stan lies dying in hospital, his daughter Claire is overseeing the Times Square Ball Drop, in which a huge glass globe is raised and lowered at midnight. The globe becomes stuck but is fixed by former employee Kominsky. Due to perform at the ceremony is rock star Jensen, who woos and reunites with his ex, a caterer named Laura. Jensen's backup singer Elise is stuck in a lift with Randy, who pursues her and kisses her after they get out. In the crowd is 15-year-old Hailey, whose mother Kim keeps a date made a year ago with one-time playboy Sam, whose family company is throwing an exclusive party. Shy record-company employee Ingrid quits her job and hires cycle courier Paul (also Randy's friend) to help her check off dreams from her wish-list, including breakfast at Tiffany's and a kiss at midnight (which Paul supplies). Meanwhile at a hospital two expectant couples compete to be the first to have a baby after midnight. Winning couple Tess and Griffin lie about the birth time to allow Grace and James to take the cash prize. As the Times Square Ball begins to drop, Claire reunites with Stan, who watches the ceremony with her before he dies.

The Nine Muses

United Kingdom 2010

Director: John Akomfrah

The Nine Muses returns to some of the preoccupations that John Akomfrah broached with the Black Audio Film Collective in the 1980s. Specifically, there are echoes here of the ways in which the BAFC's *Handsworth Songs* (1986) explored the experience of immigration via the archive. But where that film combined archival images with footage of the then urban present, *The Nine Muses* stitches its archival material together with stunning film of a serenely empty Alaska.

In Greek legend, the Muses who provide the film's title and its nine chapters – Calliope (Epic Poetry), Clio (History), Erato (Love), Euterpe (Music), Melpomene (Tragedy), Polyhymnia (Hymns), Terpsichore (Dance), Thalia (Comedy) and Urania (Astronomy) – were the product of a union between Zeus and Mnemosyne, the personification of memory. Like *Handsworth Songs*, *The Nine Muses* is a film about memory, about the way in which different kinds of memory – personal, institutional, cultural – intersect and unsettle one another.

There is no narrative line or voice in *The Nine Muses*: the voices we hear and the text we read on the intertitles are borrowed. Akomfrah has said that he wanted to remove the 'voice of God' effect voiceover tends to produce. In place of a single, allegedly authoritative voice, we are offered fragments of ubercanonical literary texts (Homer, Milton, Dante, Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Joyce, Beckett). What does this add up to? In the first place, a film that quietly mesmerises, that invites us to redream (and perhaps redeem) the canonically familiar.

The texts quoted in *The Nine Muses* are 'foundational' – for western culture, for Europeanness, for Englishness, and also for a post-war popular modernism in which Beckett and Joyce would become available via Penguin paperbacks, and in which Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* could be heard on the BBC. There's a conciliatory feel about Akomfrah's take on these sources, as if he is encountering them anew, not any more as required reading, a Great Tradition to which he must show obeisance. Instead of opposing the canonical texts to immigrant experience, *The Nine Muses* finds parallels between them. The most insistently repeated text – *The Odyssey* – is also the most foundational. Yet *The Nine Muses* reminds us that this foundation is of course a work about movement and migration.

The film's archival footage consists predominantly of images of travel and dwellings: of immigrants on ships, newly arrived, or at work. Akomfrah's sensitivity to the power of archival images (a feature of his work since the early days of the Black Audio Film Collective) is once again displayed here. By removing the narrative, Akomfrah

gives us images that are at once generic and specific. Generic, because the stories and names attached to these faces and bodies have been occluded; but specific, because these are after all particular faces and bodies, with their own signature longings, anxieties, pleasures, captured at a certain historical juncture, eyes full of hope, suspicion and joy frozen forever in the old daylight of the archive.

What is the role of the images of Alaska? In Akomfrah's hands, Alaska becomes an expressionist take on how the immigrant from warmer climes might see the land in which they arrive: cold, hostile and friendless, yet also strangely beautiful and captivating. Alaska here looks like the end of the world, in a double sense: as in the limits of hospitable territory, a place that, against all the odds, was settled; but also the world after a terrible disaster – an ice desert, snowbound ships in dock, looking as if they have been abandoned, mountains that might never have felt a human footprint. For a while it seems as if there are no humans left here; none except the explorers, clad head to toe in brightly coloured protective clothing, standing immobile in the landscape. The hoods they wear eliminate any defining characteristics – they could equally well be aliens. We don't see any other human figures in this sublimely forbidding landscape; instead, we are left to infer their presence, for what we do see is cars, speeding down solitary highways. Even here, it seems, the only constant is movement.  **Mark Fisher**

CREDITS

Producers

David Lawson

Lina Gopaul

Director of

Photography

Dewald Aukema

Editors

Milka Leskinen

Ben Hunt

Composer

Trevor Mathison

Sound

Trevor Mathison

©Smoking Dogs Films,

UK Film Council

Production

Companies

UK Film Council, The

Arts Council of England

in association with

Creation Rebel Films,

BBC English Regions,

Naxos Audio Books

AMADE

A Made in

England

initiative

A Smoking Dogs Films

production made in

association with BBC

English Regions,
Creation Rebel Films
and Soul Rebel Pictures
Supported by Arts
Council England and
BBC English Regions as
part of "Made in
England"

WITH

Trevor Mathison

John Akomfrah

yellow coats

David Lawson

blue coat

David Lawson

Trevor Mathison

black coats

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

New WaveFilms

A mixture of archive material and new footage shot in Alaska and Liverpool, the film is divided into nine chapters, each given the name of one of the Muses from Greek legend: Calliope (Epic Poetry), Clio (History), Erato (Love), Euterpe (Music), Melpomene (Tragedy), Polyhymnia (Hymns), Terpsichore (Dance), Thalia (Comedy) and Urania (Astronomy).

The archive material is, in the main, devoted to the experience of immigrants who have moved to the UK, and consists primarily of images of travel, work and home. The new material is allusive and poetic.

Patience (After Sebald)

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Grant Gee

Towards the end of Grant Gee's eulogy to the German-born Norwich-based writer W.G. Sebald (1944-2001), Lise Patt, co-editor of *Searching for Sebald*, talks about 'itinerary maps' – 'maps that were created for pilgrims that didn't actually go on pilgrimages; they would use them to sort of meditate on, and would use the images to move their mind through the different parts of the land.' Gee's film is itself an itinerary map of Sebald's 1995 masterpiece *The Rings of Saturn*, in which a Suffolk perambulation triggers layered reflections on everything from local history to the Holocaust to the cultural and industrial use of silkworms.

Gee doesn't do anything as ploddingly straightforward as merely retrace Sebald's steps: indeed, many of the film's contributors (notably the writers Iain Sinclair and Robert Macfarlane) deride the idea that this would have any value besides the physical benefits of a bracing day out. When Macfarlane tried it himself, the weather proved disconcertingly fine, unlike the book's grey, smudged photographs which sit alongside archival images of historical atrocities, a sudden glut of herring in the streets of Lowestoft visually echoed a few pages later by a forest full of human corpses following massacres in Germany or Croatia during World War II. Regular onscreen page references establish the film as a companion to the book, not a substitute. While prior familiarity with the text is not essential (the film is an excellent beginner's guide), those intrigued by its profusion of ideas will doubtless be rereading or purchasing their own copy soon after the end credits have faded.

Instead, the film recalls Sebald's own response to these various spaces, analyses his interpretations and supplies alternatives: for theatre director Katie Mitchell, the shingle beach at Benacre Broad is a mysterious Tarkovskian Zone, whereas writers Barbara Hui and Rick Moody have literally mapped the text (Moody via a flowchart, Hui via Google Maps) to trace its physical and thematic contours. Tacita Dean's recollection that her great-uncle was the judge who sentenced Sir Roger Casement to death by hanging is given uncanny potency by an otherwise unassuming shot of coat hangers swaying gently on a rack. Andrew Motion finds relationships between the text and his own childhood visits to Dunwich, whose ecclesiastical architecture is under constant threat from coastal erosion. In a passage that echoes Patrick Keiller's not dissimilar *Robinson in Ruins* (2010), Macfarlane describes Suffolk's 'defensive coast', deliberately shaped to withstand invasion from both foreigners and the sea, whereas the impracticalities of Sebald's own desire to retire to the

'miniature world' of the Ile de Saint-Pierre in Switzerland are affectionately cited by psychoanalyst Adam Phillips as evidence of the writer's often underappreciated wit.

The sense of history is intensified by most of the film being shot in black and white, its heightened grain reproducing Sebald's 'mealy dust... a dancing grainy whirl', which also relates to the book's title. The rings of Saturn derive from a moon shattered into fragments by the planet's gravitational pull, and Sebald himself confesses to a fascination for impermanent natural phenomena such as dust and mist. In one of the few images not directly sourced from the book, the artist Jeremy Millar photographs the aftermath of a firework let off in Sebald's memory at the spot where he died in a car accident, and finds a startling correspondence between the shape of one of the smoke plumes and the contours of the writer's own quizzical face. It's an appropriately Sebaldian conclusion to a film that is as exhilaratingly original as Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* (2010) in its determination to do its subject imaginative justice.

♦ Michael Brooke

CREDITS

Produced by Sarah Caddy Gareth Evans Di Robson

Filmed by Grant Gee

Edited by Grant Gee Jerry Chater

Music The Caretaker

Sound Design Jerry Chater

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Film Council

Production Company

UK Film Council

Artevents, The Re-Enchantment, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Screen South

An Artevents

production of a Grant Gee film

With the support of the

Paul Hamlyn

Foundation, the UK Film

Council's Development

and Film Funds

Enabled by Screen

South and the RIFE

Lottery Funding

Programme

An original commission

by Artevents for *The Re-Enactment*, a national arts project exploring our relationships to place (2010-2011), produced by Artevents, core funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and supported by the National Lottery through the Arts Council England

Executive Produced by

Keith Griffiths (Illumination Films)

In Colour/Black and White [1.85:1]

Distributor Soda Pictures

SYNOPSIS A documentary about W.G. Sebald and his 1995 book *The Rings of Saturn*, in which a walk through Suffolk in 1992 becomes a complex discussion of geography, history, culture and time. The work is explored from various angles by artists Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, writers Dan Gretton, Barbara Hui, Robert Macfarlane, Rick Moody, Iain Sinclair, Marina Warner and Christopher Woodward, editors Lise Patt and Bill Swainson, publisher Christopher Maclehose, psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, filmmaker Chris Petit, theatre director Katie Mitchell, architect William Firebrace, journalist Arthur Lubow and poet Andrew Motion, alongside readings from Sebald's original text.

Red Light Revolution

Australia 2010

Director: Sam Voutas

This brash, broad comedy borrows the feelgood structure of *The Full Monty* (1997) and *The Commitments* (1991): little people coming together to undertake an improbable project intended to lift them out of their poverty. The focus on sex shops reflects the fact that China really does have a vast boom in such businesses, and that some 70 per cent of the world's sex toys are manufactured there. As protagonist Shunzi (Zhao Jun) says, 'With 1.3 billion of us, that's a hell of a lot of people getting it on...' The film is determined to regard this new embrace of pleasure products as a happy route to greater openness and contentment rather than a victory for sleazy exploiters. Shunzi and his business partner Lili (Vivid Wang) find erotic curiosity smouldering in the most unexpected crannies of their community, and their triumph, with a failsafe homemade anti-impotence medicine, cosily secures homespun folk wisdom at the heart of the shiny modern sex industry.

The audience is encouraged to mirror Shunzi's trajectory from baffled disapproval to cheerful acceptance of the positive social and romantic effects of sexual experimentation. Though Shunzi initially grumbles that shops used to exist to provide necessities, and that 'nowadays it's what you want, not what you need', he soon learns that a ready supply of marital aids can cure all manner of social and domestic ills. All entirely theoretical, of course: we don't actually see anyone having sex, Shunzi and Lili's interaction remains platonic, and when Shunzi demonstrates the effectiveness of his magic medicine, the film coyly inserts a card declaring, 'This shot has been deleted.' It's the *Carry On* approach to screen sex: dwell on the notion of it obsessively but keep the real thing at a snoggy distance.

This sort of daft, undemanding mainstream comedy doesn't usually make it far out of its home territory,

and with good reason: it's hard to imagine what potential audience is out there for such a blend of prurience and naivety, particularly when the jokes are so laboured and the pacing so clunky. Zhao Jun's lead performance is big to the point of being exhausting – all popping eyes and cartoonish double-takes – and the rest of the acting work is similarly manic, frantically signposting every joke just in case we might fail to see it coming. Many jokes also seem to depend on cultural references that are utterly lost in translation.

It's interesting to see mainstream Chinese cinema exploring the culture clash between ancient and modern and eastern and western approaches to sexuality (director Sam Voutas is an Australian long resident in Beijing and fluent in Mandarin), and the film has some effective comic moments. But on the whole its jokes simply don't travel well – and its timing and performances would be clumsy in any language.

♦ Hannah McGill

CREDITS

Produced by

Melanie Ansley

Written by

Sam Voutas

Cinematographer

Wang Yifan

Editor

Sam Voutas

Art Director

Yuan Feng

Sound Recordist

Jules Ambroisine

Wardrobe

Wei Xiaoyan

©Scopofile

Production Company

A Scopofile production

Executive Producers

Jane Zheng

Tess Liu

Tai Tai

Tian Huimin

Shunzi's dad

Ji Qin

Sunzi's mum

Bo Bing

Old Qu

Virgin Chen

Skinny

Yao Jianxiong

Ye Ye

Tao Yangyang

sign shop boss

Wang Liangsheng

Gramps

In Colour [1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Terracotta Distribution

CAST

Zhao Jun

Shunzi

Vivid Wang

Lili

Jiang Xiduo

Jiang

Masanobu Otsuka

Iggy

Zhao Jun



SYNOPSIS Beijing, the present. Conservative, chauvinistic Shunzi is fired from his cab-driving job. His wife throws him out and he moves back in with his parents, who make medicines. Taking on a humiliating job promoting a diet drink, he befriends a young colleague, Lili. He also runs into old school friend Jiang, who has done well selling sex toys for an eccentric investor named Iggy; Jiang explains that really successful promoters of these products, such as the Australian Jack Deroux, can make their fortunes. Jiang suggests that Shunzi meet Iggy and discuss investment in a sex shop. Lili reveals that she has access to an empty shop belonging to her grandmother, and the two become partners in the endeavour. Business is slow to begin with, but the local community soon becomes keen on their products and rallies to support them. However, they don't have a permit to trade, and their stock is confiscated by the local neighbourhood watchman. Iggy demands his investment back, and becomes threatening. Shunzi returns to his job selling diet drinks. Lili gathers the sex shop's loyal customers to find a solution. With the help of Shunzi's mother, she restocks the shop with Chinese medicine that cures impotence. Shunzi is unconvinced, but on testing the concoction he determines that it is highly effective. He goes to a sex expo where Jiang is working, and presents his product to sex-shop guru Deroux. He demonstrates its effectiveness, and causes a sensation. Jiang offers to buy 50,000 bottles, but Shunzi turns him down and returns to the sex shop to find Lili.

Shame

United Kingdom/Canada 2011
Director: Steve McQueen
Certificate 18 100m 45s

Looked at one way, *Shame* is an upscale, broodier version of a Judd Apatow or Todd Phillips movie. A *Men Behaving Badly* – or perhaps *Men Behaving Sadly* – for the arthouse set, it follows Brandon (Michael Fassbender), a thirtysomething Manhattanite whose life revolves around sex. On those nights he's not having it away with hookers or random pick-ups, he can be found at home, taking it easy with a beer, a takeaway and a ton of laptop porn. Most of his biggest dramas – being caught masturbating by his sister, being unable to get an erection when he's in bed with an attractive co-worker, an emotional maelstrom that ends with him in a gay club – could easily be played for laughs.

But this is a Steve McQueen film. Even in his four-minute gallery piece *Deadpan* (1997), a reworking of the collapsing-house sequence from Charles Reisner and Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), the humour was mordant rather than explosive, private as much as it was communal. It's no surprise then that sex addiction, a quasi-condition associated with B-list celebrities and usually ripe for tabloid mockery, is depicted here as a species of anomie, or that Brandon is an alienated, weirdly anhedonic metropolitan man of the kind that's a staple of modernist literature and cinema.

The Manhattan through which Brandon moves, looking ashen and in a state of early rigor mortis, is an anaesthetised greyscape redolent of the closing sequences of Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1977). Living in a blantly minimalist bachelor pad at its dead(ened) midtown centre and working at some identikit legal/zombie-finance office, he's constantly in a state of libidinal frenzy. But there's little joissance. His orgasms are mechanical. After falling out with his vulnerable, warmhearted sister Sissy (Carey Mulligan), who's shown up unexpectedly to stay at his apartment, he sits beside her in hospital and stares at her recently slashed wrists: their livid scars are remnants of emotions he can scarcely name, far less feel.

Is Brandon's combination of radical depersonalisation and acquisitive recklessness a prerequisite of corporate capitalism? Politics in McQueen's films are always oblique, a matter of tentative inference – in *Static* (2009), a helicopter flies counterclockwise around the Statue of Liberty; *Drumroll* (1997), a coded allegory of invisible labour, features a barrel being wearily pushed through the streets of New York; and Brandon is certainly nowhere near the monster of Patrick Bateman in Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (2000).

Yet it's hard not to wonder about Brandon's status as an Irish immigrant. He's often looking towards Jersey, the city to which his parents brought him as a teenager: above it bursts one of the film's few eruptions of colour; it's the



Sweet smell of sexiness: Carey Mulligan, Michael Fassbender

place he gazes at across the Hudson River when he feels wretched and in turmoil. Is his anomie partly exilic? That might explain his welling up at Sissy's extraordinary rendition of 'New York, New York': shot in close-up, she strips the song of barroom bravura, slows it down to a breaking point like a sonic version of Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) and transforms it into a plaintive ballad of American liminality.

For all his much ballyhooed full-frontal nudity, Fassbender – as he did with Bobby Sands in McQueen's *Hunger* (2008) – endows Brandon with an ambiguity that shades into inscrutability. But he doesn't try to make his character charming or roguishly confused – a decision that will likely lead some viewers to damn the film itself as frigid and remote. More jarring: a patchy script co-written by Abi Morgan (*Brick Lane*, *The Iron Lady*) and studded with unnecessarily blunt lines ("Actions speak louder than words"); sound design that makes heavyhanded

use of Bach's Goldberg Variations and ticking clocks to signal tension; and a third act that not only veers into Gaspar Noé territory but also gestures rather limply at a backstory.

McQueen, as in the man-to-man jousting in *Bear* (1993) and the centrepiece debate about suicide in *Hunger*, is at his best when staging wrestling bouts – be they psychological, intellectual or erotic. The most memorable scenes in *Shame*, other than a tremendous sustained tracking shot of Brandon jogging across town, are those in which he grapples with others: on a surprisingly mellow, funny date with a co-worker (an excellent Nicole Beharie); in his borderline-incestuous battles with Sissy; in the two thrillingly extended flirtation scenes with the same subway passenger that top and tail the film. It's here that McQueen goes beyond the formalist, almost paralysing control of which he's such a master, and hints at witty, looser directions he might profitably pursue in the future.

— Sukhdev Sandhu

CREDITS

Produced by

Iain Canning
Emile Sherman

Written by

Steve McQueen
Abi Morgan

Director of

Photography

Sean Bobbitt

Editor

Joe Walker

Production Designer

Judy Becker

Composer

Harry Escott

Sound Mixer

Ken Ishii

Costume Designer

David Robinson

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Limited, Channel Four Television Corporation and The British Film Institute

Production Companies

A Film4 and UK Film Council presentation in association with Alliance

Films, Lipsync Productions and

Hanway Films

A See-Saw Films

production for Film4

and the UK Film Council

Developed with the assistance of Film4

Developed in association with

Buckland Productions

Filmed with the support

of the New York State

Governor's Office for Motion Picture and Television Development

Made with the support of the UK Film Council's Development Fund and Film4

Executive Producers

Tessa Ross

Robert Walak

Peter Hampden

Tim Haslam

CAST

Michael Fassbender

Brandon

Carey Mulligan

Sissy

James Badge Dale

David

Nicole Beharie

Marianne

Lucy Walters

woman on subway train

Mari-Ange Ramirez

Alexa

Alex Manette

Steven

Hannah Ware

Samantha

Elizabeth Masucci

Elizabeth

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Momentum Pictures

9,067 ft +9 frames

SYNOPSIS New York, present day. Brandon, a thirtysomething Irish-American working in the corporate sector, locks eyes with an attractive woman on the subway. He follows her but loses her in the crowd. His younger sister Sissy turns up unannounced at his apartment. Her arrival does not, however, put a brake on his sexual addiction: he masturbates in the shower, consumes internet porn and has alfresco sex with virtual strangers.

One night Sissy is singing in a cabaret. Brandon attends the show with his boss David; the latter makes a play for Sissy that ends up with the pair of them in Brandon's apartment. On another night, Brandon goes on a date with co-worker Marianne, and on a subsequent afternoon whisks her to a hotel for cocaine-fuelled sex. He is mortified that he can't get an erection, but is more successful when, after Marianne has left, he calls on the services of a prostitute. Later, turned away from a club, he propositions a younger woman whose boyfriend follows him outside and beats him up. Brandon goes to a gay club where he gets a blowjob, before progressing to a threesome with two female prostitutes. In the morning, he returns to his apartment to find that Sissy, whom he had told to leave, has slashed her wrists in the bathroom. She recovers, but he is distraught.

On a subway journey, he sees the same woman he previously tailed. They lock eyes.

Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows

USA/Australia 2011
Director: Guy Ritchie
Certificate 12A 128m 37s

To bolster his reimagining of Arthur Conan Doyle's dispassionate, cerebral sleuth as a shambling, scruffy, clownish savant – with Robert Downey Jr drawing on previous performances as Charlie Chaplin and Tony Stark rather than looking to Holmesian studies from Basil Rathbone, Peter Cushing or Jeremy Brett – Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) slyly poached a trick from George Stevens's 1939 *Gunga Din*, which itself lifted the basic premise of the often-filmed play *The Front Page*: an adventurer can't bear to lose his best friend/partner to marriage and sets out to scupper his engagement by dragging him into a series of boyish scrapes. At various points in this sequel, Downey Jr's Holmes turns to Jude Law's battered, frustrated Watson – whom he has 'rescued' from a honeymoon in Brighton – and desperately asks him how much he is loving this adventure. The problem is that, this time, the answer has to be "not so much".

Though Jared Harris's bearded, soft-spoken, cold-eyed Moriarty is given the canonical 'Napoleon of Crime' tag, his enterprise is less criminal than financial and political. The business about starting a European war to boost arms profits goes back to Basil Dearden's *The Assassination Bureau* (1969), one of a cycle of crowded, period-set action-adventure comedies that includes Billy Wilder's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970), the first film to advance the notion of Holmes as an emotional basket-case rather than a cool calculating machine; it's also close to the scheme Moriarty was behind in a later, lesser example of the form, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003). The individual parts of the plan – assuming nobody will look for the victim cleanly shot in the head by a sniper at the site of a bomb outrage – are more ingenious than the blunt, prosaic overall scheme. Ritchie comes up with breathtaking moments – replacing the traditional 'elementary', my dear Watson' monologue of deductions – when Holmes's POV takes over and his thought process is illustrated: trapped in a cellar, he spots highlighted anomalies which prompt a hallucinatory flashback to the installation of a secret exit that enables a miraculous escape. In the climax, Holmes and Moriarty both think through the fight they're about to have – Moriarty sees an inevitable victory (Holmes has been wounded) and Holmes concurs, which prompts a seeming self-sacrifice instantly revoked in a manner Doyle took ten years to get around to.

On a scene-by-scene basis, *A Game of Shadows* is lively and diverting, but as



Victorian secret: Jude Law, Robert Downey Jr

→ a whole the film is a shambles sorely lacking the emotional through-line afforded by the *Gunga Din* gambit, which flags after Watson's actual marriage. Given that Moriarty murders the only woman Holmes has ever cared about (Rachel McAdams, briefly reprising her Irene Adler), it seems crass that the rest of the movie gives her nary a thought and that Holmes doesn't quit the comedy antics to get serious about avenging 'the Woman'.

Stephen Fry is added to the team as the indolent, corpulent older brother Mycroft Holmes, who gets his own character makeover as a gay nudist with

doddering retainers out of *Sir Henry at Rawlinson End* (1980). Ritchie goes for cheap laughs by having the brothers call each other "Mikey" and "Shirley", and has Sherlock conveniently forget that someone he acknowledges as cleverer is on hand in the climax when Dr Watson is left to puzzle out the identity of the secret assassin ("You know my methods"). Also wasted is Noomi Rapace, the original Lisbeth Salander: a supposed leading lady who has no connection with either male lead and is ditched on the dance floor when the detective changes partners to waltz with Watson.  **Kim Newman**

assistance of the French Tax Rebate for International Productions

Executive Producers

Bruce Berman
Steve Clark-Hall

CAST

Robert Downey Jr

Sherlock Holmes

Jude Law

Dr John Watson

Noomi Rapace

Madam Simza Heron

Rachel McAdams

Irene Adler

Jared Harris

Professor James Moriarty

Stephen Fry

Mycroft Holmes

Paul Anderson

Colonel Sebastian Moran

Kelly Reilly

Mary Watson

Geraldine James

Mrs Hudson

Eddie Marsan

Inspector Lestrade

William Houston

Constable Clark

Wolf Kahler

Doctor Hoffmannstahl

Dolby Digital/

Datasat Digital

Sound/SDDS

Colour by

Technicolor

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros

Distributors (UK)

11,575 ft 8+ frames

The Sitter

USA 2011

Director: David Gordon Green

Certificate 15 81m 8s

The Sitter is David Gordon Green's latest homage to the basic cable classics of the 1980s, following *Pineapple Express* (a conflation of stoner comedies and buddy-action films like Green's beloved *Tango & Cash*) and *Your Highness* (a higher-quality gloss on the likes of *Krull*, only this time with intentionally funny jokes). The stated reference points this time include *Adventures in Babysitting* and *After Hours*, though other 80s staples pop up in the background and on the soundtrack, with a particular emphasis on kickboxing. The end credits emerge to the backing of Biz Markie's 'Just a Friend', an apt metaphor for this laughably incompetent but mildly endearing movie.

The Sitter's main asset is Jonah Hill, whose perpetual loser Noah Griffith responds with admirable equanimity to every complication thrown his way. Noah is a college dropout whose 'girlfriend' Marisa (Ari Graynor) lets him go down on her but won't reciprocate; ever hopeful but not too bright about interpersonal matters, Noah thinks their relationship is 'the real deal'. After agreeing to babysit three kids – anxiety-ridden Slater, diva-in-training Blithe and adopted Salvadoran Rodrigo – Noah gets a call from Marisa, who asks him to pick up some cocaine and meet her at a party, promising intercourse in return. Predictably, Noah grabs the family minivan and sets out with the kids; equally predictably, it's just the start of a crazy night that'll pause just long enough for everyone to receive one life lesson apiece.

Raggedly shredded down to 82 minutes, *The Sitter* moves jerkily from one scene to the next, connected by lots of shots from the minivan's windshield.

There are plenty of jokes about jive-talking black people, and a weird emphasis on gay roller-skaters – not politically objectionable, just stale, but unluckily in keeping with the retro vibe. As in *Pineapple*, there's a lot of deliberately clumsy violence and clunkier camerawork; in terms of the characters, the worst offenders are Sam Rockwell as drug-dealer Karl and Landry Bender's Blithe, whose sole personality trait is wanting to grow up to be a celebrity with her own perfume line.

On the plus side, there's Max Records as Slater, a logical follow-up to his role as *Where the Wild Things Are*'s Max. When the quiet, handsome, vest-wearing boy freaks out one too many times, Noah snaps and tells him the truth about his anxiety in a scene that's a small marvel of eloquent, pragmatic sexual tolerance; it's the best moment of its kind since Ben Affleck's similar invitation to Jason Lee to come out of the closet in *Chasing Amy* (1997). It's the only time the film seems like the work of the director so good with kids at their most vulnerable in *George Washington*, *Undertow* and *Snow Angels*.

 **Vadim Rizov**

CREDITS

Produced by

Michael De Luca

Written by

Brian Gatewood

Alessandro Tanaka

Director of

Photography

Tim Orr

Edited by

Craig Alpert

Production Designer

Richard A. Wright

Music

David Wingo

Jeff McIlwain

Production Sound

Mixer

Christof Gebert

Costume Designer

Leah Katznelson

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Production Companies

Twentieth Century Fox presents a Michael De Luca/Rough House production

Made in association with Dune

Entertainment Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development



Adventures in babysitting: Jonah Hill

Executive Producers
Jonah Hill
Donald J. Lee, Jr.
Lisa Muskat
Josh Bratman
Film Extracts
The Diamonds of Metro Valley (2010)
American Anthem (1986)
Dark Angel (1990)

CAST

Jonah Hill
Noah Griffith
Max Records
Slater
Ari Graynor
Marisa Lewis
JB Smoove
Julio
Sam Rockwell
Karl
Landry Bender
Blithe
Kevin Hernandez
Rodrigo
Kylie Bunbury
Roxanne
Erin Daniels
Mrs Pedulla
D.W. Moffett
Dr Pedulla
Jessica Hecht
Sandy Griffith
Bruce Altman
Jim Griffith
Cliff 'Method Man'
Smith
Jacolby
Sean Patrick Doyle
Garv
Alex Wolff
Clayton
Jack Krizmanich
Ricky Fontaine

Dolby Digital/Datasat
Digital Sound/SDDS
Colour by
Technicolor
Prints by
DeLuxe
[185:1]
Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)
7,302 ft +0 frames

Tatsumi

Singapore/Japan 2011
Director: Eric Khoo
Certificate: 15 96m 5s

Singaporean filmmaker Eric Khoo takes up animation for the first time in this quasi-biopic of Japanese manga artist Tatsumi Yoshihiro (b. 1935), combining a chronological reconstruction of key events in Tatsumi's life with adaptations of five of the typically spare, bleak stories about socially awkward and psychologically damaged individuals that are characteristic of the Tatsumi-created genre known as *gekiga*, a kind of manga specifically aimed at adult readers (an equivalent in English would be the distinction between 'graphic novel' and 'comic book').

The stories contain the film's dramatic meat and are often immensely powerful: they all end badly, some fatally, others following intense personal humiliation which in one case involves drunken incest. On this evidence, a Tatsumi protagonist is a deeply flawed human being: lonely, socially and sexually awkward (Hanayama in 'Just a Man' is literally impotent, while others male characters have severe difficulties relating to flesh-and-blood women), prone to impulsive decisions and badly misjudging the moment, most heartbreakingly when the unemployably disabled protagonist of 'Beloved Monkey' thinks that he's doing his now unaffordable pet a favour by smuggling it into the zoo. They're often nervous and sweaty (a recurring visual motif) and feel guilt even in situations where they're clearly victims of circumstance.

This is well illustrated by the first story, 'Hell', in which the photographer Koyanagi captures an image of shadows literally burned into a wall by the blast of the Hiroshima bomb, only to discover once the photograph becomes famous that the story behind it is far more complicated than first appeared. But the saga's villain has already paid a terrible price for his crime, forced to live underground in deteriorating health because his legend can only remain in print for as long as he remains on the official Hiroshima death list. One could therefore argue that Koyanagi's murderous method of resolving the issue is in fact an act of charity, despite the lifelong guilt it engenders.

The film is less convincing in the way that it interweaves the stories with chronological episodes from Tatsumi's own life. Presumably out of respect for the artist (who makes a live-action appearance at the end), Khoo sticks to the facts, but runs up against the perennial problem bedeviling biographers of prolific writers: when 95 per cent of their waking hours are spent hunched over a desk, they're not especially compelling subjects. Compared with the traumas visited on his characters, Tatsumi's own life seems remarkably tranquil: mild filial and fraternal spats are resolved by early success and independence, periods of unemployment are glossed over (though the subject is dramatised



Portrait of an artist: 'Tatsumi'

horribly vividly in 'Beloved Monkey' and 'Occupied'), his briefly sketched marriage seems idyllic (notably unlike that of Hanayama, who blows his life savings on a grand affair), his relationship with his much respected mentor Tezuka Osamu almost equally so, and he surmounts the threat of PTA protests about the adult-oriented content of his work by devising the *gekiga* label.

The entire film is animated in a Tatsumi-influenced style, with individual stories given visual variety. The two 'oldest' in terms of their setting,

'Hell' and 'Good-Bye', have a deliberately distressed look (tramlines and chemical blotches respectively), while 'Beloved Monkey' is mainly in pure black and white aside from the bright-red gore splattering the artwork as intrusively and obscenely as the toilet graffiti that obsesses the protagonist of 'Occupied'. The biographical material is mainly in colour, as if to emphasise the distinction between Tatsumi's real and imaginary universes – although, paradoxically, it's the latter that come across much more vividly. But this may well be how Tatsumi prefers it.  **Michael Brooke**

CREDITS

Produced by
Tan Fong Cheng
Animation Producer
Esaaf Andreas Sinaulan
Producers
Phil Mitchell
Freddie Yeo
Eric Khoo
Written by
Based on *A Drifting Life* and the short stories of Yoshihiro Tatsumi
Editor
Phil Mitchell
Art Director
Widhi Saputro

Music
Christopher Khoo
Christine Sham
Sound Director
Kazz
Creative Animation
Director
Phil Mitchell

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Production Companies
Zhao Wei Films in association with Infinite Frameworks present a film by Eric Khoo

Hiromi Oi
Yumi Kitahama
Tadashi Saito
Yukimi Oka
Nahoko Kodama
Koji Yurugi

VOICE CAST
Tetsuya Bessho
Yoshihiro Tatsumi
Motoko Gollent
Fumisige Tamura
Hiroaki Osada
Yasuyuki Okuda

Distributor
Soda Pictures

8,647 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Events in the life of pioneering Japanese manga artist Tatsumi Yoshihiro are interspersed with five of his stories: 'Hell', 'Beloved Monkey', 'Just a Man', 'Occupied' and 'Good-Bye'.

Set in Hiroshima, 'Hell' tells the story of Koyanagi, who photographs burned-in shadows of a son massaging his mother's shoulders. The image becomes famous, but the son, Yamada, tells Koyanagi that what the picture actually shows is his mother being strangled by the killer he hired in order to release his inheritance. Assuming that Yamada's already recorded death will prevent identification, Koyanagi kills him, but has to live with the guilt.

In 'Beloved Monkey', factory worker Yoshida falls for Reiko. After an industrial accident severs his arm, he finds that Reiko is a professional escort. Unable to support his pet monkey, Yoshida releases it into the zoo's monkey enclosure, where it is torn to pieces.

'Just a Man' features manager Hanayama who, approaching retirement, resolves to spend his secret savings on women as revenge for his wife's affair. After various unsuccessful dates, he gets together with his colleague Ms Okawa, but finds himself impotent at the crucial moment. He goes to Yasukuni Shrine, mounts its symbolic cannon and urinates into the dark.

In 'Occupied', manga artist Shimokawa, faced with the loss of his job with a children's book company, becomes obsessed with obscene graffiti in a particular toilet. Offered a new job at an adult-oriented magazine, he celebrates by drawing his own toilet graffiti, and is arrested.

'Good-Bye' tells the story of Mariko, who works as a prostitute during the US occupation and falls for American soldier Joe. When Joe leaves her, she gets drunk and seduces her estranged father, so that he can be 'just another man' to her.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1

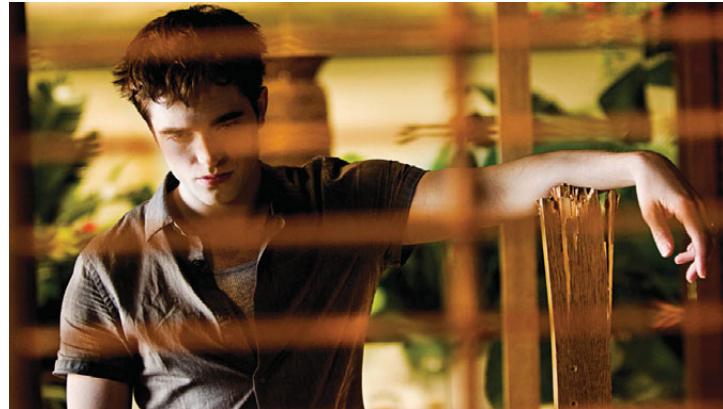
USA 2011

Director: Bill Condon

Certificate 12A 117m Os

Following the Harry Potter bandwagon, author Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* franchise extends itself in the cinema by splitting the final novel into two parts. There may have been a commercial impetus behind this decision, but at least it means that this penultimate movie is less cluttered than its predecessors *New Moon* and *Eclipse*. Chris Weitz and David Slade, picking up the reins after Catherine Hardwicke's unceremonious departure following the first film, delivered plodding episodes, less convinced by the romantic triangle that powers the storyline and tending to devolve into camp. Bill Condon, who is handling both the wrap-up films, trusts romantic melodrama as a form and is comfortable with presenting young men as objects of desire (his previous work includes a *Candyman* sequel and *Gods and Monsters*), even if he gets stuck with what feels like a vampire retread of the 'I'm having my baby no matter what' message of *Juno* rather than an exploration of the pregnant-by-a-vampire theme put forth in a couple of interesting 1970s genre footnotes, *The Dracula Saga* and *Grave of the Vampire*.

As well as developing the love story between Bella Swan and vampire Edward Cullen, the other *Twilight* films worked up suspense by never forgetting that, though the Cullen clan are provisionally benevolent, bad vampires will sooner or later show up and pose a threat to Bella's idyll. Here, the bad vampires are represented in an early dream sequence in which the happy couple have scarlet blood spattered on their white wedding clothes and stand atop a mountain of corpses – but they are then set aside until a scene embedded in the end credits which indicates that Michael Sheen's mulleted Dracula stand-in will be doing Disney villainess service next time round. The omission leaves the



Blood wedding: Robert Pattinson

story without an active villain: the differences between werewolf Jacob and the alpha of his wolf pack are a clash between two good guys over an obscure point of law (as opposed to lore); and no Hollywood film is ever going to argue in favour of abortion, so the unborn baby that threatens Bella's life is a paper-tiger menace. Bereft of plot, the film consists of: one-third wedding jitters (Edward's bachelor party takes place off in the woods unseen, and Bella seemingly doesn't get a hen night) and dreamily perfect sylvan ceremony with the edge taken off by funny/embarrassing deadpan speeches; one-third postcard romantic honeymoon with decorous but dangerous lovemaking; and one-third difficult delivery with unhelpful werewolves outside.

Only in the final act does anything of moment happen. The heroine's long-delayed morphing into porcelain-

skinned, red-eyed vampire is trumped by the more interesting development whereby Jacob shifts his obsessive affections (in wolf terms, 'imprinting') from mother to daughter, envisioning the grown-up Renesmee (naming the girl is one area where Bella is lampooned as the self-dramatising ditz her non-fans see) in a flashforward which confirms that she won't be stuck as a blood-drinking baby the way some movie vampires (such as the absent Dakota Fanning character) are as pre-adolescents.

The subgenre of YA vampire romance remains peculiar, more interesting as a cultural phenomenon than for the achievements of individual works. If *Breaking Dawn Part 1* is a modest improvement on the earlier sequels – and Meyer's quite dreadful books – it's still unlikely to win converts to Team Twilight.  Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by

Wyck Godfrey
Karen Rosenthal
Stephenie Meyer

Screenplay

Melissa Rosenberg
Based on the novel
Breaking Dawn by
Stephenie Meyer

Director of

Photography
Guillermo Navarro

Editor

Virginia Katz

Production Designer

Richard Sherman

Music by/Music

Orchestrated by

Carter Burwell

Sound Mixer

Steve C. Aaron

Costume Designer

Michael Wilkinson

Visual Effects/Wolf

Animation

Tippett Studio

Visual Effects

Lola | VFX

Image Engine

Spin VFX

Wildfire Visual Effects

Mr. X Inc.

Soho VFX

Engine Room LLC

Digicore

Hydraulix VFX

Modus FX

Comen VFX

Pixel Magic

Cebas Canada

Visual Effects/

Animation

Method (CIS) Canada

Main Titles/Visual

Effects

Prologue

Stunt Co-ordinators

Louisiana:

Jeff Imada

Vancouver:

Scott Ateah

Brazil:

Marcio Caldas

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Entertainment, LLC

Production

Companies

Summit Entertainment

presents a Temple Hill

production in

association with

Sunswept

Entertainment

Executive Producers

Marty Bowen

Greg Mooradian

Mark Morgan

Guy Oseary

Film Extracts

Bride of Frankenstein

(1935)

CAST

Kristen Stewart

Bella Swan

Robert Pattinson

Edward Cullen

Taylor Lautner

Jacob Black

Billy Burke

Charlie Swan

Peter Facinelli

Dr Carlisle Cullen

Elizabeth Reaser

Esme Cullen

Kellan Lutz

Emmett Cullen

A Useful Life

Uruguay/Spain/
The Netherlands 2010

Director: Federico Veiroj

Cinema is changing rapidly, and so are the habits of old-time hardcore cinephiles. But all that time spent in the dark watching flickering images, sitting on rundown chairs with a mere handful of other film devotees, is not all in vain. For this can also be a 'useful life', as Jorge, the protagonist of this second comedy from Uruguayan director Federico Veiroj, discovers in the course of the film's captivating, warmly unassuming 66 minutes.

Trying to save a ship that is irredeemably sinking, middle-aged, single, good-natured and proper-to-a-fault Jorge (played with pitch-perfect sobriety by real-life film critic Jorge Jellinek) has dedicated 25 years of his life to running Montevideo's Cinematheque, together with its director Martínez (Manuel Martínez Carril, the former director of this real-life organisation). But the decline in attendances and regular malfunctioning of equipment proves too much for the funders, who decide not to "carry on supporting cultural institutions that are not profitable projects". Unable to sustain itself economically, the Cinematheque has to close down – a momentous event that, together with an encounter with a woman, Paola, will change Jorge's life forever.

Albeit fictional, the struggle to survive of Jorge's cinephile haven inevitably resonates at a time of crisis for cultural institutions. Yet this is no nostalgic elegy for the past, but a journey into a hopeful future, played out through a deadpan, tongue-in-cheek seriousness that more than once verges on absurdity. A former cinematheque employee himself, Veiroj manipulates the language of classical cinema with measured dexterity to pay a heartfelt, exquisite homage to this increasingly precarious way of life.

Shot in colour but transferred to a rich, grainy black and white, every frame is lifted from film history and instantly familiar – from the geometric angles of German expressionism, to the saturated contrasts of silent cinema, and extreme close-ups on objects, hands and faces recalling Gregg Toland's photography in *Citizen Kane*. Arauco Hernández Holz's camera accompanies Jorge down corridors and into storage rooms to reveal the heart and soul of what feels like a pulsating organism, at times reminiscent of the building in Lisandro Alonso's *Fantasma* (2006), itself an old Buenos Aires cinema.

The score – originally composed in the 1920s by Eduardo Fabini – also pastiches westerns, silent films, musicals and classical Hollywood. The fact that it's not used diegetically means we hear the music as if it's emerging from a nearby screening, or as if we are able to hear what's going on in Jorge's mind – an evocation of the many films he conjures in order to help him confront his new life, in which he reinvents himself as the

SYNOPSIS Forks, Washington, the present. Bella Swan marries vampire Edward Cullen. Werewolf Jacob Black, who is also in love with Bella, is worried that the marriage will lead to her death – and vows to kill Edward if this is the case.

The couple honeymoon on an island off the coast of Brazil. Bella insists that she and Edward have sex before he turns her into a vampire – though he is wary of losing control and harming her. Unprecedentedly, Bella falls pregnant and the fast-growing foetus threatens to kill her. Edward brings Bella back to his family home, where Dr Carlisle Cullen, his adoptive father, tries to keep her alive. Edward and Jacob both favour termination, but Bella insists on having the baby even if she dies in childbirth. The terms of the treaty between vampires and werewolves state that if Bella dies, the werewolves are obliged to avenge her by killing the Cullen clan. Jacob breaks with Sam, the alpha of his pack, and with friends Seth and Leah forms his own pack to protect the Cullens. Drinking human blood gives Bella the strength to come to term, though she dies during a caesarean section and Edward has to inject her with his venom so that she can be reborn as a vampire – though this doesn't appear to work. The werewolves besiege the Cullens' home. Jacob intends to kill Edward, but 'imprints' on the newborn baby Renesmee, recognising her as his soulmate. This renders her and the Cullens out of bounds for the werewolves. Bella is reborn as a vampire.

Meanwhile, vampire patriarch Aro expresses an interest in the child.



Still life: Jorge Jellinek

hero of his own romantic film.

Like the denizens of the cinephile town in Alejandro Agresti's *El viento se llevó lo qué* (1998), Jorge's existence literally becomes the snippets of films to which he's dedicated his whole life. Hence the trumpets of Ford's *Stagecoach* announce the beginning of his new incarnation; he discovers the streets of Montevideo like Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*; he dances with Fred Astaire's

debonair panache on the steps of the university; and walks into the flickering lights of the big city as in Murnau's *Sunrise*. Exhilaratingly idiosyncratic, Veiroj's film is ultimately an ode to the blind faith – childlike if you will, like Ana's relationship with *Frankenstein* in Erice's masterly *Spirit of the Beehive* – in the transformative power of film.

••• **Mar Diestro-Dópido**

CREDITS

Production
Laura Gutman
Juan José López
Screenplay
Arauco Hernández Holz
Inés Bortagaray
Gonzalo Delgado
Federico Veiroj
Monologue in class
inspired by Mark Twain
Director of Photography
Arauco Hernández
Editing
Arauco Hernández
Federico Veiroj
Art Director
Emilia Carlevaro
Sound
Raúl Locatelli
Daniel Yafalán

Costume Designer

Emilia Carlevaro
©Federico Veiroj,
Mediaproducción, S.L.,
Versatil Cinema, S.L.
Production Companies
Cinekdoque presents in
co-production with
Mediapro, Versatil
Cinema with the
support of Montevideo
de Todos, Montevideo
Socio Audiovisual,
Hubert Bals Fund with
the collaboration of
ICAA, Catalan Films &
TV, Generalitat de
Catalunya - Institut
Català de les Indústries
Culturals, Instituto del

CAST

Jorge Jellinek
Jorge
Manuel Martínez Carril
Martínez
Paola Venditto
Paola
Gonzalo Delgado
director
Felipe Arcena
Inriáte's son
Victoria Novick
student

SYNOPSIS Montevideo, the present. Middle-aged and single, Jorge lives with his father and has worked at the Uruguayan Cinematheque for 25 years. Together with Martínez, the cinema's director, he is in charge of projection, programming, hosting a radio show, introducing filmmakers, doing the accounts and recording membership numbers. One day he offers a complimentary ticket to law teacher Paola, who has come to see a film. He invites her for coffee as she's leaving after the film but she excuses herself, saying she has exams to mark. The cinema is in arrears with the rent and its equipment is in a critical condition; the employees learn that the Cinematheque's funders will no longer support it because it isn't profitable. Suddenly finding himself out of work, Jorge is tearful and confused first, but then phones the university to check what time Paola finishes teaching. With an hour to spare, he enters a classroom and passes for a substitute teacher. He gives a speech about lying before being asked to leave. He goes to the hairdresser's for a trim and surprises Paola on her way out of work. He invites her to the cinema; after some initial hesitation, she accepts.



Four legs good: Jeremy Irvine

War Horse

USA/India 2011

Director: Steven Spielberg

Certificate: 12A 146m 27s

Since WWII subject-matter prompted two of Steven Spielberg's strongest films in *Schindler's List* (1993) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), it's with some anticipation that one awaits his take on the Great War, not least because it follows in the traces of both Michael Morpurgo's much loved original novel and a theatrical version that has wowed London and Broadway.

In the event, however, the film's fairly conventional approach to the story of a Devon farm boy and his horse as they're divided by the 1914-18 hostilities actually highlights the problematic aspects of the material, since the celluloid attempt to shape emotive statements about the horrors of war and the suffering of the innocent is rather scuppered by a narrative through-line that's episodic, sketchy and seemingly contrived. Set beside the equine-eye view of Morpurgo's source and the striking use of puppetry in the stage incarnation, Spielberg's offering, with

its expansive historical recreation of the front lines and very real horses centre-stage, is certainly less stylistically radical than either, instead seeming predicated on the notion that the subject-matter is so inherently touching that everything else will pretty much take care of itself.

One standout sequence apart, the overall emotional impact is surprisingly underwhelming. Having passed through the hands of the British and German military, Joey, the plucky steed at the heart of the action, finds himself free at last, but can only dash across the trenches and the pockmarked landscape of the Somme, dragging barbed wire along until he can move no further – an awful image of natural beauty transfigured by human intervention into ugliness and pain. That one moment says everything the film has to say, the rest turns out to be a matter of traffic management, shifting the horse and his human soulmate Albert through a familiar trajectory of bonding, division, struggle and so forth. It's all very much in the classic mould, yet notwithstanding the rhapsodic hectoring of one of John Williams's blandest scores, one remains surprisingly unmoved.

Comparisons with a good old-

SYNOPSIS Rural Devon, 1913. Teenager Albert Narracott is captivated by the chestnut horse bought by his father Ted at auction. Rose, Ted's long-suffering wife, fears that the new arrival, named Joey, is a show horse unsuitable for farm work, but Albert proves Joey's worth by ploughing up a rock-clogged field for a turnip harvest to pay off landlord Lyons. Flooding later destroys the crop, and Ted sells the animal to the army, since war has just been declared.

Captain Nicholls vows to Albert to care for Joey, but he's killed when the British cavalry charge into German machine guns. Joey survives and is seconded to the German ambulance corps, only to be taken by deserting teenage brothers Gunther and Michael. They are later executed, but not before leaving the horse with an elderly French farmer and his granddaughter Emilie, who immediately bonds with Joey. German forces again commandeer the animal, and Joey ends up pulling heavy artillery at the front. Released by a kindly handler, the horse becomes tangled in barbed wire in no-man's-land. British soldier Geordie and German counterpart Peter together free Joey. A British doctor subsequently decides to put the animal down, but Albert, now an infantryman temporarily blinded in a gas attack, proves his ownership and gains a reprieve.

After the armistice, Joey is auctioned off, bought by the same French farmer in memory of Emilie (lost during the war), then graciously returned to Albert. Horse and young man return home to Devon.

fashioned MGM blubfest, Fred M. Wilcox's 1946 *Courage of Lassie*, prove instructive here, since the story outline (in which Lassie serves the WWII US Army in the Aleutians) is almost identical. In the unpretentious 1940s programmer, though, the active part played by the canine hero in battle and journeying home to teenage owner Elizabeth Taylor seems the key to the movie's sentimental potency. *War Horse*'s screenwriters Lee Hall and Richard Curtis, on the other hand, while rendering Joey a faithful pal for fellow combatant mount Topthorn, can do little but make him the passive recipient of whatever the humans mete out, whether abiding heartlessness or isolated moments of compassion. In that respect, Joey's closer to the ill-treated donkey in Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) – a metaphorical reflection of fallen mankind's imperfections – than he is rootable Hollywood animal-film hero, so perhaps over-riding metaphor and underlying story template coming from rather different places suggests why the film doesn't quite come off.

That said, we're still aware of being in the presence of one of cinema's great shot-makers. Spielberg covers an ill-fated massed British cavalry charge with a sidelong tracking shot straight out of Olivier's *Henry V* (1944), the camera then overtaking the horses to rest chillingly on the German machine guns about to open fire. There's an element of *Private Ryan*-lite about the combat scenes elsewhere, yet one simple cut conveys maximum impact – a horse-drawn cannon's strenuous progress up a muddy incline, followed by a telling reverse view of the apocalyptically ravaged French countryside on full display for the first time. Far from Spielberg's best, then, but there are definitely moments to lodge in the memory.  **Trevor Johnston**

CREDITS

Produced by Steven Spielberg, Kathleen Kennedy
Screenplay Lee Hall, Richard Curtis
 Based on the novel by Michael Morpurgo and the stage play by Nick Stafford
Director of Photography Janusz Kaminski
Edited by Michael Kahn
Production Designer Rick Carter
Music John Williams
Sound Designer Gary Rydstrom
Costume Designer JoAnna Johnston
Visual Effects Framestore Limited
Stunt Co-ordinator Rob Inch

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Production Companies DreamWorks Pictures and Reliance Entertainment present An Amblin Entertainment / Kennedy/Marshall Company production A Steven Spielberg film Touchstone Pictures
Executive Producers Frank Marshall

Revel Guest

CAST
Emily Watson Rose Narracott
David Thewlis Lyons
Peter Mullan Ted Narracott
Niels Arestrup grandfather
Tom Hiddleston Captain Jim Nichols
Jeremy Irvine Albert Narracott
Benedict Cumberbatch Major Stewart
Toby Kebbell Colin
David Kross Gunther
Nicholas Bro Friedrich
Rainer Bock Brant
Patrick Kennedy Waverly
Celine Buckens Emilie

Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS In Colour Prints by DeLuxe [2.35:1]
Distributor Buena Vista International (UK)
13,180 ft +8 frames

The abdication waltz: James D'Arcy, Andrea Riseborough

W.E.

Director: Madonna
Certificate 15 119m 1s

Famously the originator of the maxim that "A woman can't be too rich or too thin," the couture-clad king-catcher and probable Nazi sympathiser Wallis Simpson was apparently horribly misunderstood. According to Madonna's breathless, misty-eyed makeover of this material girl, Wallis was a helpless victim of the irresistible forces of love and history rather than the scheming gold-digger familiar to us all the way from *Edward & Mrs Simpson* (1978) to *The King's Speech* (2010).

Though this fluffy, fantasy account of the American adventuress is as tunnel-visioned as *The Iron Lady* in ignoring dissent about a controversial female figure, it opts to be merely a well-dressed 'no one ever asks what she gave up' whine rather than a full-bore feminist reimagining. Not that it digs deep at any point into either Wallis's times or her psyche, in the style of *Coco Before Chanel* (2009). This is a film full of shiny surfaces, not even history-lite but history-as-lifestyle, presenting her scandalous 1930s affair and abdication angst through an advertisement-styled stream of cocktail parties, Riviera jaunts and jewelled love tokens.

It comes wrapped in a superfluous and glossily vapid contemporary plot about unhappily married New York society wife Wally, whose mooning obsession with the Duchess of Windsor and the 1998 Sotheby's auction of her belongings sparks her own love affair with a Russian security guard. As with other recent films such as *Sarah's Key* or *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, which believe that history is more 'accessible' presented via a mystical bond with a contemporary heroine in crisis, Wally's strand functions chiefly as a clunking echo chamber for the period plot, the pair forming a choppy and unsatisfying whole. Of the two, Wallis and Edward VIII's love story, delivered as a series of pointedly poignant or arch vignettes full of brittle chat but with a proper sequence of

dramatic events, comes off rather better.

Both strands suffer from a luxury-object fetish, the camera licking over monogrammed linens, tinkling teacups and endless Windsor jewels, using close-ups to effect time-travel between Wally's world and her fantasies of Wallis. Indeed, there's so much fondling of the Windsors' saleroom knick-knacks, alternating with moody moaning through corridors and forlorn mirror gazing, that Wally's wafer-thin tale resembles a high-end perfume commercial.

With little drama to provide character interest, save a couple of stinkingly vicious fights with her brutal husband William (Richard Coyle, dripping contempt and accusations of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's Nazi dabblings), Abby Cornish's Wally remains a glazed, well-groomed cipher throughout. The film's lone consolation is Andrea Riseborough's game, drily

CREDITS

Produced by Madonna
Written by Madonna
Director of Photography Hagen Bogdanski
Editor Danny B. Tull
Production Designer Martin Childs
Music Abel Korzeniowski
Production Sound Mixer Chris Munro

Costume Designer Arianne Phillips
©[TBC]

Production Companies Semtex Films presents in association with IM Global
Executive Producers Scott Franklin
 Donna Gigliotti
 Harvey Weinstein

CAST

Abbie Cornish Wally Winthrop
Andrea Riseborough Wallis Simpson

flirtatious Wallis, who puts some snap into her seduction of James D'Arcy's besotted Prince of Wales, and real pathos into the dance he requests on his deathbed, an old lady doggedly Twisting with the girlish high spirits he craves. It's the one affecting moment in a film that's otherwise sheenily sentimental. Unlike its predecessor *Filth and Wisdom* (2008) it's never inept, but Madonna's directorial style seems leaden and tricksy all at once, the grainy visuals titivated with slow-mo or frenetic cutting. Despite an ill-advised attempt at postmodern *Marie Antoinette* playfulness when Wallis dances to 'Pretty Vacant' at a Benzedrine-fuelled party, and some lurchingly odd encounters between Wally and Wallis, it's a film with absolutely no élan or personal style – a supreme irony for a film made about a fashion icon by an even bigger one.

 **Kate Stables**

James D'Arcy Edward
Oscar Isaac Oscar Isaac
Evgeni Evgeni
Richard Coyle Richard Coyle
William Winthrop William Winthrop
David Harbour David Harbour
Ernest Ernest
James Fox James Fox
King George V King George V
Judy Parfitt Judy Parfitt
Queen Mary Queen Mary
Haluk Bilgir Haluk Bilgir
Al Fayed Al Fayed
Geoffrey Palmer Geoffrey Palmer
Stanley Baldwin Stanley Baldwin
Natalie Dormer Natalie Dormer
Elizabeth Elizabeth
Laurence Fox Laurence Fox
Bertie Bertie

Douglas Reith Douglas Reith
Lord Brownlow Lord Brownlow

Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor StudioCanal Limited

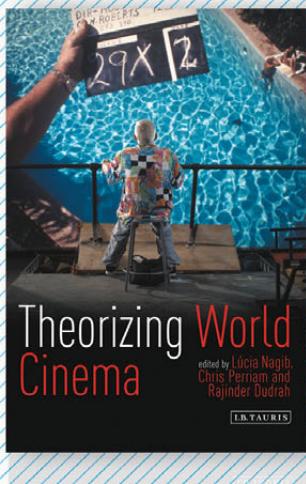
10,711 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS New York, 1998. Unhappily married society wife Wally becomes obsessed with Wallis Simpson, whose possessions are being exhibited for auction. Her visits to the sale preview trigger fantasies of Wallis's love affair with the Prince of Wales, and the two women's stories start to run in tandem.

Wallis gradually becomes Edward's mistress. Wally flirts with Russian émigré Evgeni, a security guard at Sotheby's, and abandons her IVF injections. Press and palace pressure mounts on Wallis and Edward, who travel and entertain lavishly as a couple. Wally's marriage to her largely absent and unfaithful husband disintegrates. He beats her up for spending \$11,000 at the auction. On becoming king, Edward refuses to renounce Wallis, who tries to leave him. He abdicates, they marry, and are shunned by the new king and queen. Evgeni rescues the battered Wally and they fall in love. Learning that Mohamed Al Fayed has Wallis's letters, Wally obtains his permission to read them in Wallis's Paris house, for a book project. She learns that Wallis felt trapped by her obligations to the Duke of Windsor, and found their life a burden. Back in New York, Wally makes peace with the phantom Wallis, and discovers that she is pregnant.



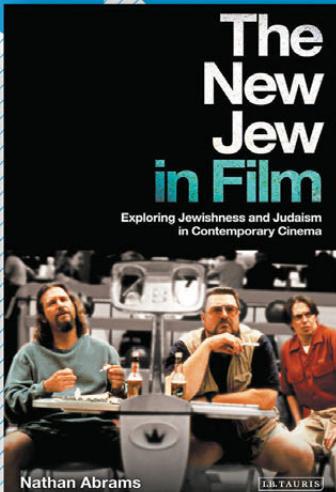
Read



Theorizing World Cinema

Edited by Lucia Nagib, Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah

I.B. TAURIS

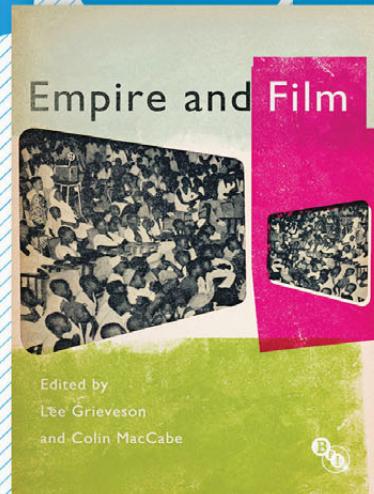


The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema

By Nathan Abrams, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback £14.99, ISBN 978184885755

This groundbreaking and innovative book is about the place of World Cinema in the cultural imaginary. It also repositions World Cinema in a wider discursive space than is usually the case and treats it as an object of theoretical enquiry, rather than as a commercial label. The editors and distinguished group of contributors, including Laura Mulvey, John Caughey, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Julian Smith, offer a range of approaches and case studies whose organising principle is the developing idea of polycentrism as applied to cinema. They refine and redefine key concepts in film studies, including identification, representation and identity, narrative and realism, allegory and the national project, auteurism and the popular, art and genre.

www.ibtauris.com



Edited by
Lee Grieveson
and Colin MacCabe

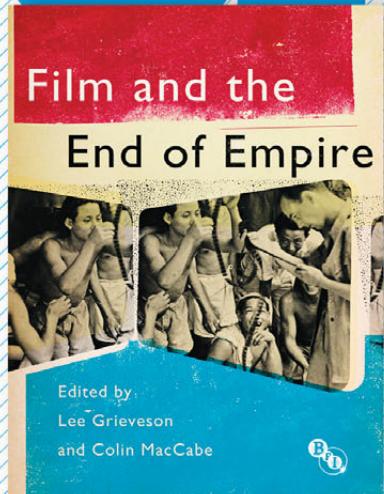
BFI

Empire and Film

Edited by Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, Cultural Histories of Cinema series, Palgrave Macmillan/BFI Publishing, 304pp, paperback, £18.99, ISBN 9781844574216

Empire and Film explores the relationship between cinema and colonialism, focusing on how film was used by the British to sustain and develop their empire in the early 20th century. Featuring richly illustrated images from the BFI National Archive and contributions from international scholars, the book covers the period stretching from the emergence of cinema at the height of imperialism to moments of decolonisation and the ending of formal imperialism after the Second World War. It is published in conjunction with www.colonialfilm.org.uk, a major website providing digitised archival films and materials relating to British colonial cinema.

www.palgrave.com/bfi



Film and the End of Empire

Edited by
Lee Grieveson
and Colin MacCabe

BFI

Film and the End of Empire

Edited by Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, Cultural Histories of Cinema series, Palgrave Macmillan/BFI Publishing, 320pp, paperback, £18.99, ISBN 9781844574230

In this volume of original essays, international scholars explore the fascinating story of how cinema was used to sustain colonialism in the mid-20th century and also to register the changes of decolonisation and facilitate a new global order of things. This book is richly illustrated with images from the BFI National Archive. It is published in conjunction with www.colonialfilm.org.uk, a major website providing digitised archival films and materials relating to British colonial cinema.

www.palgrave.com/bfi

Audio dynamite



Listen with prejudice: Gene Hackman in 'The Conversation'

A tale of surveillance and hacking, 'The Conversation' is uncannily relevant to our times, writes Michael Brooke

The Conversation

Francis Ford Coppola; US 1974; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 108/114 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: commentaries by Coppola and Walter Murch, interviews with Coppola, Gene Hackman and David Shire, screen tests, script extracts, booklet

When 'The Conversation' premiered in April 1974, Francis Ford Coppola's psychological thriller about a surveillance expert was assumed to have been directly inspired by the then unfolding Watergate scandal, though the original script had been written in the late 1960s. Still, this could only enhance its appeal to the cognoscenti (the following month, it would win the Palme d'Or; the following year, an Oscar nomination for best picture), and by a fortuitous coincidence this Blu-ray and DVD reissue comes at a time when the film's central theme has rarely been so prominent or widely discussed.

To underline this, the review copy arrived on the day when a woman's xenophobic outburst on a South London tram had been covertly filmed and uploaded to YouTube for the voyeuristic delectation of hundreds of thousands, and when the ongoing Leveson Inquiry into UK press standards was probing a seemingly systemic use of eavesdropping that Coppola's protagonist Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) would completely

recognise. Indeed, Glenn Mulcaire, the much vilified 'News of the World' voicemail hacker, is close to a real-life equivalent, his obsessively meticulous record-keeping ultimately providing rather more evidence of wrongdoing than his paymasters would ideally have liked. When 'The Conversation' was made, remotely operated public CCTV cameras of the kind that Caul briefly plays with during an equipment fair had only recently been installed (in New York's Times Square, in 1973); now, they're ubiquitous.

Caul would doubtless regard all these developments as an irritating and deeply unwanted encroachment on his own professional fiefdom. Hackman's intensely withdrawn performance, the hardest kind for a leading actor to bring off (especially an extrovert like Hackman), only comes to animated and enthusiastic life when Caul is discussing technology and technique: at all other times his life is strictly controlled and compartmentalised, with even sex arranged by appointment.

A hard-earned understanding of the nature of sound, from its original production through to recording, enhancing and editing, means that Caul can pull off the seemingly impossible feat of recording an entire conversation between two people (Cindy Williams and Frederic Forrest) walking around a crowded and noisy public space, while taking into account the fact that they're expecting to be spied on and constantly vigilant. When he plays back the tape in its final edited form and explains how he did it in exhaustive and borderline nerdish detail, he's proudly unveiling his masterpiece.

Where things go badly wrong is when Caul then switches from professional snooper to amateur sleuth. Just as a

misinterpreted voicemail message or paparazzi snapshot can land a newspaper with a hefty libel settlement, so Caul's attempt at interpreting the meaning of the conversation, second-guessing its possible consequences and attempting to prevent what he believes to be an imminent tragedy, is both misguided and, ultimately, professionally and psychologically devastating. It's easy to understand his curiosity from a human perspective, since the behaviour of his employers (fronted by a repellently unctuous pre-stardom Harrison Ford) is so patently suspicious and the prospect of a murder seemingly all too real – but it's also none of his business, hard though it must be for "the best bugger on the West Coast" to accept that argument.

Caul's onscreen perfectionism is matched by the behind-the-scenes alliance between Coppola and his co-auteur Walter Murch, who oversaw the film's editing and post-production while Coppola was busy making 'The Godfather Part II'. The opening scene in San Francisco's Union Square, in which the conversation is recorded in the first place, remains a masterclass of staging and editing, the soundtrack constantly dissolving into electronic chirrups (just as the 35mm version drove unprepared projectionists spare, so this version will cause equipment-conscious domestic viewers to momentarily panic about their

speakers) as Caul and his team, which includes John Cazale in the second of his five films, constantly track and retrack their quarry, attempting to frame and focus the sound with the same precision as Haskell Wexler's camera (Wexler shot this sequence before being replaced by Bill Butler).

As with earlier DVD and Blu-ray releases of Coppola's back catalogue, 'The Conversation' was repackaged by his own American Zoetrope company, with Coppola himself credited as the project producer. The Blu-ray transfer isn't quite perfect, as there's a faint but perceptible sheen of digital noise, but it's mostly very satisfying indeed. The surround soundtrack has considerably more authority than many such remixes, having been supervised by Murch himself, but purists will be grateful for the inclusion of the mono original. Extensive extras start with two nicely divergent commentaries from Coppola and Murch: unsurprisingly, the former is more generalised, the latter more technical.

Other extras include interviews with Hackman (1974) and composer David Shire (2011), archival screen tests (including Harrison Ford trying out the Frederic Forrest role), on-set footage of Coppola directing Hackman and lengthy excerpts from the screenplay presented both in onscreen facsimile and via Coppola's own dictated recordings. But perhaps the most appropriate extra is a short video piece that compares shots from the film with their real-life locations nearly 40 years on, a neatly microcosmic illustration of the way 'The Conversation' plays out in 2011, with some things changing totally while others remain unsettlingly similar.

Hackman's Harry Caul only comes to enthusiastic life when discussing technology

NEW RELEASES

The Cranes Are Flying

Mikhail Kalatozov; USSR 1957; Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 91 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Film: Mikhail Kalatozov's Palme d'Or winner transcends its origins as a Soviet propaganda film, combining social-realist elements with extraordinary flights of lyricism. The film also boasts a searing performance from Tatiana Samoilova as the tragic heroine Veronica, whose life unravels as a result of her separation from her lover during WWII.

The early pre-war scenes are conventional enough: we see Veronica and her fiancé Boris (Alexei Batalov) courting, and families in cramped apartments discussing their futures. Once war comes, however, the storytelling style intensifies. There are moving, extraordinarily elaborate sequences (crafted by cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky, whose lithe, fluid camerawork anticipates that found in his later collaboration with Kalatozov, the equally visually inventive *I Am Cuba*) showing the menfolk saying their goodbyes to their families before they go off to battle. A key moment, in which Veronica's apartment is destroyed in an air raid and she is seemingly raped by her fiancé's cousin, is shot in expressionistic fashion, like something out of a gothic horror film. The sequence in which Boris dies is likewise stylised and lyrical; as he falls to his knees in the mud, the camera whirls around him and he has visions of Veronica, her beauty contrasting with the cold and squalor of his surroundings.

The Cranes Are Flying may have been made under the post-Stalin Soviet system but it has the same emotional intensity and inventive formal approach that characterised the French New Wave films of the same era. Samoilova (later to play Anna Karenina) has real star quality – something Kalatozov underlines in the many scenes devoted to her, such as the strange, discordant sequence in which we see her running as if to commit suicide by jumping in front of a train, only to pull back at the last moment.

Disc: Artificial Eye's new DVD sadly comes with no extras, despite following an earlier Region 2 DVD release from Nouveaux Pictures, which came with three versions of the film: two Russian (one in mono) and an English-dubbed version, and extras including archive footage of a parade in Red Square. (GM)

Delitto d'amore

Luigi Comencini; Italy 1974; RaroVideo/Region 0 DVD; 101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.73:1; Features: critic lecture/interview, booklet

Film: Something like the exploited-prole counterpart to Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964), this socially loaded romantic 70s melodrama presents us with a grim and chilly Milan full of pollution and worker malaise – it's not long before we realise that the familiar and ever-present Italian mist subsuming every street and landscape is actually a toxic



The Cranes Are Flying

The film boasts a searing performance from Tatiana Samoilova as the tragic heroine whose life unravels during WWII

cloud created by the aluminium-casing factory at the centre of the story.

Director Luigi Comencini, a long-haul journeyman who started out as an urban documentarian during the neorealist years and hung in there long enough to do Laura Antonelli comedies and TV, is no artisan, but this film wants to have it all, using its spare Romeo and Juliet love story to limn huge crises at the heart of modern Italian life.

Stefania Sandrelli is a winsome, unpredictable Sicilian girl come north for factory work and living in a Third World slum, while spaghetti-western alum Giuliano Gemma plays the hunky, guileless Milanese anarchist the new girl in town chooses as her future husband. Their romance proceeds as best it can given that the Sicilian clan in question would kill her sooner than let her marry a godless northerner.

The prejudicial north-south Italian divide, ignited by northward migration,

has rarely been given such vivid backlighting; in one scene, a Communist Party meeting unleashes a debate about traditional Italian norms regarding women and how party participation can get them killed by their own brothers. At the same time, bigotry toward Sicilians is everywhere; at one point someone uses the epithet "Moroccan!", and when the hero's mother asks him, "Does she wash at least?" he spits back, "No. So what?" The old ways are still poisoning the well, but poisons are everywhere – even a let's-get-away trip to the river reveals gobs of soapy congestion and a littering of dead bunting. The air, inside and out of the factory, is grey with metallic dust.

In the end, it's the finely detailed machinations of soul-killing, body-wrecking factory work and industrial malfeasance that turn the story's key and enable it to echo Zola as it indicts a nexus of social ills more in the manner of a Communist Bloc New Waver than a Hollywood 'issue film'. For all its graceless pulpiness, the film ends up being very tender and resonant.

Disc: Amid the extras, a pro-Comencini pitch made by scholar Adriano Apra is overshadowed by the



Fight club:
'The Four Feathers'

typically loaded RaroVideo booklet, which helpfully includes reviews and journalism from the 1974 Italian press. (MA)

A Farewell to Arms

Frank Borzage; US 1932; Kino/Region XX DVD/Region A Blu-ray; 89 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: stills, trailers for other titles

Film: The first attempt at adapting Hemingway to orthodox Hollywood folkways, this lush Paramount romance limned the problem for all future movie versions of the man's work – namely that fiction entirely dependent on the unsaid and the unexpressed (or, sometimes, minimally said and minimally expressed) is all but impossible to film in traditional dramatic terms. (They're still trying, and still getting it wrong – perhaps if Hou Hsiao-Hsien took a shot?) The result is, however, endearingly potent and often freakish early-talkie hokum, with director Borzage largely ignoring the presumably puzzling ellipses of Hemingway's prose and dialogue and just going for the soft-focused pathos.

The WWI lovers caught in the oddly troublesome circumstances of behind-the-lines hospital politics and the exigencies of war are played by Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes, and while Hayes locates plenty of off-kilter, whispering emotional notes, Cooper's brand of gawky emotionalism is as far from Hemingway as one can imagine.

Whereas the novel's romanticism is as dry as vermouth, Borzage's take is sweeter than apricot brandy, carrying with him the Murnauvian palette of gauzy grays and elaborate tracking shots that he'd picked up from his late-1920s years at Fox alongside the *Sunrise* director. He's alive to the feverish moments of separation and reunion that the protagonists experience, managing at one peak moment a pan away from a darkened bed to the window and the Italian rooftops outside, building slowly to one of the pre-Code era's greatest 'fuck fades'. (The premarital sex and pregnancy of the story aren't euphemised a lick, and the frankness makes Hayes's rather earnest Catherine faintly ooze with sexuality.) There are other pleasures to be had, including the amused awkwardness the couple exude in trying to close the enormous height gap between them when they kiss, and a bizarrely expressionistic war montage that reeks of Gance and Pabst (and Guy Maddin's *Archangel*, made over half a century later); a shot of a writhing bandaged man crucified in a giant, distorted Caligari box, with a Red Cross emblem behind him, is an undecipherable splurge of weirdness.

Borzage was the first great Hollywood romantic, and his quiet, falling-teardrop sensibility flows out of this faltering hybrid like rainwater.

Disc: This Blu-ray edition is almost impossibly crystal-clear; even the sutures and frame flaws look like they're happening in your lap. The extras are negligible. (MA)

NEW RELEASES

The Four Feathers

Zoltan Korda; UK 1939; Criterion/Region 1 DVD/Region A Blu-ray; 115 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary, new video interview with David Korda, 1939 short featuring footage of Zoltan Korda on set, trailer, essay

Film: For all its imperial themes and flag-waving depiction of British derring-do, this adaptation of A.E.W. Mason's much filmed novel has a contemporary resonance. In our so-called age of terror, its imagery of western soldiers fighting Pyrrhic battles against a shadowy Arab enemy can't help but seem familiar. The film is also easy to read against the grain: it is as much an attack on the foolishness of war as it is a celebration of courage under fire.

Korda doesn't skimp on the brutality: the scenes in which Durrance (Ralph Richardson), the 'cowardly' hero's best friend and rival in love, suffers sun blindness and is left to wander in a daze across the desert as the vultures congregate overhead remain terrifying. There is also a glaring contrast between war as described by the chauvinistic old officer (C. Aubrey Smith) at the dining-room table and the reality as experienced by the British prisoners, humiliated and paraded through the streets.

The filmmakers don't take much interest in why the British are fighting –

nor is there any attempt to sketch the enemy, the Khalifa's army, in anything but the most cursory way – and contemporary audiences can't help but recoil at the racist, sub-*Monty Python* language used to characterise the Arab antagonists. Shekhar Kapur's 2002 film version was much more explicit in its critique of the bloodlust and chauvinism of the British imperial army. Nonetheless, Korda does hint at the double standards of the soldiers who reject Harry Faversham (John Clements) simply because he doesn't want to fight. The society in which he's caught is so rigid that there's no room for individualism or rebelliousness – Harry comes from a family of soldiers and has no choice but to emulate them.

The British scenes occasionally have a slightly artificial, studio-bound feel, but the film benefits from Georges Périnal's magnificent location cinematography, and the set pieces are as spectacular as anything found in the most lavish Hollywood westerns of the era. Ralph Richardson gives one of his greatest screen performances as the blinded soldier desperately trying to keep up appearances in the face of catastrophe.

Disc: Criterion's digital high-definition restoration has removed scratches and dirt, and looks remarkable on both DVD and Blu-ray. The Technicolor



BFI STILLS, POSTER AND DESIGN (C)

Desolation row: Mifune Toshiro in Kurosawa Akira's 'The Lower Depths'

cinematography looks strangely pale in places but this is a typically detailed and painstaking Criterion release – one that puts earlier British DVD editions to shame. (GM)

Deep (1993). *Happy People* may be less distinctive than that underheralded film, but it's still a fascinating window on to the very alien lives of people with whom we share the same planet.

Disc: No extras. (JB)

Happy People: A Year in the Taiga

Werner Herzog and Dmitry Vasyukov; Second Sight/Region 2 DVD; Germany 2010; Certificate PG; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

Film: Werner Herzog's name is unsurprisingly given prominence on the DVD sleeve, but *Happy People* began as a TV project for Russian director Dmitry Vasyukov, who, with his tiny, very hardy crew, followed the daily life and work of various inhabitants of the remote Siberian trapping and fishing village of Bakhzia over the course of a year, from the isolation and dark of the bitter winter to the mosquito-infested summer. The resulting footage originally screened over four hours on Russian television; then Herzog became involved, editing the material down to 90 minutes and adding his customary voiceover.

Despite Herzog's involvement, the film retains a vaguely National Geographic TV documentary quality, especially through the grating and distancing American-accented dubbing of the local characters – an inexplicable decision which threatens to undermine the whole film. However, the sheer majesty and otherness of the forbiddingly endless, densely forested landscape is transfixing in itself, as are some of the characters, in particular the eccentric trapper Vasyukov follows while on the long hunting expeditions of the winter months, when – snow-mobile aside – he survives in a manner unchanged for centuries, alone but for his dog.

Herzog had filmed in Siberia before, looking at local myths, religions and legends in the remarkable *Bells from the*

Deep (1993). *Happy People* may be less distinctive than that underheralded film, but it's still a fascinating window on to the very alien lives of people with whom we share the same planet.

Disc: No extras. (JB)

Kurosawa Classic Collection

Ikiru/I Live in Fear/The Lower Depths/Red Beard/Dodes'ka-den

Kurosawa Akira; Japan 1952/1955/1957/1965/1970; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 662 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1 ('Red Beard' 2.35:1 anamorphic); Features: Alex Cox introductions, text biographies, booklet

Films: The latest BFI Kurosawa box-set is released in parallel with the *Kurosawa Crime Collection* containing *Drunken Angel* (1948), *Stray Dog* (1949), *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) and *High and Low* (1963), which when combined with the BFI's previously released *Early Kurosawa* and *Kurosawa Samurai Collection* comprise two-thirds of the director's output. The entire *Crime Collection* and three films in the *Classic Collection* consist of previously released BFI DVDs, but the latter also includes two UK DVD premieres in *The Lower Depths* and *Dodes'ka-den*.

They make a very effective double-bill, since they're both immensely sympathetic studies of derelict characters written off by mainstream society and forced to live in abject and inescapable poverty. Kurosawa's second foray into Russian literature after *The Idiot* (1951), *The Lower Depths* adapts Maxim Gorky's 1902 play and is truer to the source than is Renoir's 1936 version, not least by remaining confined to its flophouse setting and immediate environs and retaining the original deeply pessimistic (albeit rousing) staged conclusion. Although unusually dialogue-heavy for Kurosawa (certainly in comparison with *Throne of Blood*, the film's immediate predecessor), any impression that this is little more than a filmed stage production is banished by the confidence with which Kurosawa

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composes every frame, allocating each member of his superb ensemble cast (including Kurosawa regulars Mifune Toshiro, Chiaki Minoru and Fujiwara Kamatari) their own physical and mental space with which to construct their private universe, albeit one constantly interrupted by unwanted neighbours or visitors. The latter include the landlady (Yamada Isuzu) and a visiting pilgrim (Hidari Bokuzen) who spouts beatific aphorisms stressing the virtue of hope over despair, not always to the warmest of receptions.

Dodes'ka-den has a similar subject and setting, though the treatment is very different. It was Kurosawa's first colour feature, and the trained painter in him couldn't resist extensive experimentation with lighting, design and make-up: a lurid sunset is as garishly artificial as anything in a Hollywood Technicolor musical. While the characters in the earlier film also clung to elaborate fantasies, here these are given something approaching tangible form; in one scene, for example, a beggar wills a startlingly modernist house into existence. The film's title is onomatopoeic, and broadly equivalent to 'clickety-clack', uttered obsessively by a boy driving an imaginary tram in the junkyard around which the central shantytown is based.

Discs: Sourced from Toho's own masters, the transfers are fine, and print damage is generally age-related, with *Dodes'ka-den* the cleanest. On-disc extras mainly comprise text biographies, though *Ikiru* and *Red Beard* also get enthusiastic introductions by Alex Cox. The booklet is the usual solid effort, with essays on individual films by *S&S* Features Editor James Bell and contributor Philip Kemp. (MB)

Little Big Man

Arthur Penn; US 1970; CBS/Region 1 DVD; 139 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9

Film: The last of the red-hot postmod picaresques – maybe the only red-hot postmod picaresque – Arthur Penn's satirical western epic is far more typical of his filmography than of American New Wave anti-westerns. Penn's signature penchant, from his early TV work to *The Missouri Breaks* (1976), was for a kind of Yankee-chump hyperbole, a post-Fuller cartoonishness that ironically stands out from the ultra-realism of the day like plastic flowers in the desert. (Oh, if only Hal Ashby or John Boorman had made *Bonnie and Clyde*.) *Little Big Man*, respecting Thomas Berger's novel, trips through the reminiscences of a 121-year-old nursing-home codger (Dustin Hoffman, under a carpet of latex) who claims to be the only remaining white survivor of Custer's Last Stand. The narrative is lightly absurd, bouncing impishly in flashback along the hero's arc, from pioneer orphan to Cheyenne adoptee to Christian pilgrim, snake-oil seller, gunslinger, mountain man and, eventually, scout for Custer (who, as personified by a supremely outrageous

A suitable boy

Once our most popular child star, Sabu is mostly forgotten today. Kate Stables reckons it's high time we reassessed his striking, unselfconscious charm

Sabu!

Elephant Boy/The Drum/Jungle Book

Robert J. Flaherty and Zoltan Korda/ Zoltan Korda/Zoltan Korda; UK 1937/ 38/42; Eclipse/Region 1 DVD; 82/98/ 106 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: sleeve notes by Michael Koresky

Little more than a half-forgotten curiosity to audiences now, or an occasional source of conference papers for academics, Sabu was once the most popular child star in the history of the British film industry. He made his name appearing in films for Alexander Korda's Empire cinema, which in recent years has been a cultural problem rather than a pleasure, a cluster of colonial condescension and lavish Orientalist fantasies to be unpicked. So Criterion's celebratory Eclipse reissue of three of his Korda-era movies offers a good opportunity to re-evaluate an actor of whom the 'New York Times' said in 1937: "His naturalness beneath the camera's scrutiny should bring blushes to the faces of the precocious wonder children of Hollywood."

Plucked from the household of the Maharajah of Mysore by cinematographer Osmond Borradaile as an 11-year-old mahout, Selar Shaik, renamed 'Sabu', shot to stardom in 'Elephant Boy' (1937) the first of Eclipse's trio. This Kipling adaptation has a unique appeal which belies its unexpected combination of Robert Flaherty's leisurely, light-dappled ethnographic Indian footage and the conventional dramatic filling whipped together by Zoltan Korda at Denham Studios at his brother's behest. Sabu's striking, unselfconscious charm on camera as Toomai, saviour of the elephant drive, bonds the film's two modes effectively, despite his having learnt his dialogue phonetically.

Alexander Korda's publicity understandably made much of Sabu's rags-to-riches rise to fame, starting the elision of his real-life and film personae that was to haunt his career. As Michael Koresky's excellent liner notes point out, he came to symbolise the contentedly colonised as well as the exotic – very visibly so in 'The Drum'. Concocted rapidly as a vehicle for Sabu by 'Four Feathers' author A.E.W. Mason, this 1938 imperialist adventure about a rebellious kingdom on the North West Frontier is set during the Raj, but as the historian Prem Chowdhry has explored, its themes and representations sparked controversy among Indian audiences and critics. Released at a time of burgeoning Indian nationalism, the film was picketed, withdrawn and eventually banned in



A deeply moral Mowgli: Sabu in 'Jungle Book'

He came to symbolise the contentedly colonised as well as the exotic

India. Viewed today, its interest lies less in Sabu's endearing performance than in deconstructing its clunking defence of colonialism, as Sabu's Prince Azim demonstrates his impermeable allegiance to Roger Livesey's paternalistic Captain Carruthers and pleads to be allowed to try on the Gordon Highlanders uniform of his drummer-boy pal. However, Raymond Massey's Prince Ghul, suavely plotting rebellion against 'the army of occupation', makes the anti-British case with a conviction that highlights how complex the film's reception must have been for Indian audiences.

If Sabu's status as a symbol of India was problematic for his countrymen, his films were equally influential internationally. As Vijay Prashad notes in his book 'The Karma of Brown Folk', Sabu's films played a key role in the 1930s and 1940s in developing US ideas of Orientalism, "his film career tied to the animals and forests that denoted India". Nowhere more so than in 'Jungle Book' (1942), designed by the Kordas to capitalise on the success of 'The Thief of Bagdad'. Sabu's feral, childlike Mowgli, sweatily lithe and half-naked, seems the epitome of the Orientalist view of the east. But here at least Sabu got to shine without playing a happily dominated native or sidekick, and his intense, physical portrayal brings the deeply moral Mowgli to barking, sniffing life, rounding on the 'man pack' who covet

the jungle's hidden treasure. His final collaboration with the Kordas is also one of their finest films, its spectacular Technicolor jungle sequences complete with real panthers, tigers and wolves weaving through Vincent Korda's gorgeous sets.

Shot in Hollywood studios and California forests, 'Jungle Book' is a fine example of Zoltan Korda's skill at conjuring storybook fantasy from diverse locations and ingredients. His direction of all three films is a thread that makes this package coherent and eloquent, in a way that often eludes star-led DVD collections. You can see his craft developing from the neatly segued narrative of 'Elephant Boy' through the stirring battle sequences of 'The Drum', whose seamless mix of footage originated both in India and in South Wales. For 'Jungle Book', Korda marshalled 40 acres of man-made jungle and 300 animals with aplomb, and his imaginative mingling of live animal close-ups and spectacular sequences lends it an enduring mix of reality and enchantment.

All three films emerge perfectly well in Eclipse's transfers, with 'Elephant Boy' and 'Jungle Book' in credible and rather good shape respectively. 'The Drum' has a slightly ochre tint and scratchier look, but is quite bearable.

Sabu's subsequent career found him unable to shake off his native boy typecasting, which continued through a series of undistinguished Maria Montez pictures for Universal and for the rest of his film roles. When he died at the age of 39 after a 28-year career mostly spent in America, he was still yoked to it, the 'New York Times' announcing breathlessly that "Sabu the Elephant Boy is Dead."

A girl, a gun and a car

Bertrand Blier's 1974 'road movie' boasts a pair of abominable, irresistible central performances, says Tim Lucas

Going Places (Les Valseuses)

Bertrand Blier; France 1974; Kino Lorber/Region 1 DVD/Region A Blu-ray; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: theatrical trailer, stills gallery

The original French title of Bertrand Blier's breakthrough film, which made an international star of Gérard Depardieu, translates crudely as 'The Balls'. The title, derived like the film from Blier's own novel, alludes to the brash effrontery of its two young, thrill-seeking protagonists, Jean-Claude (Depardieu) and Pierrot (Patrick Dewaere), whom we first meet roaming the streets of a French suburb, stalking, prodding and groping a frightened middle-aged woman who wants only to get safely home with her box of pastries. The title becomes more pointedly relevant when these two nuts opt to return a 'borrowed' Citroën DS sports car to the place where they found it, resulting in a gunshot and a painful testicular injury for Pierrot, who fears that he has paid for their impulsive joyride with his masculinity. While the need to stay a step ahead of the law propels them on to the open road – hence the desexualised English title, which aptly pegs the film as a road picture – it is Jean-Claude's determination to guide his friend back into the saddle that propels the story forward.

At the time this film was made, the long-haired, unwashed appearance of the two leads was enough for most adult viewers to brand them undesirable outlaws, but Blier quickly draws a comparison between the bullying, sexist ways of Jean-Claude and those of a middle-aged store manager to show that such people exist on many levels and in all walks of life. Jean-Claude (bell-bottomed, fit, surprisingly thoughtful and not above forcing himself sexually on Pierrot to prove that his wounded sex hasn't left him gay) has a gift for sniffing out whatever he and the satyr-faced, weaselly neurotic Pierrot happen to need, whether it's a handy getaway car, a stuffed wallet or an accommodating woman. This aspect led critic Pauline Kael to see the film as "a celebration and a satire of men's daydreams", but beneath its freewheeling, anarchic spirit, 'Going Places' is also a serious film about heterosexual panic and the compulsion to continually prove oneself sexually and creatively by breaking new barriers. Its canvas is nothing less than French cinema itself – a reading telegraphed by the talismanic, supportive casting of Brigitte Fossey and Jeanne Moreau.

Fossey, the heartrending child star of René Clément's 'Forbidden Games'



Sex drive: Patrick Dewaere, Miou-Miou and Gérard Depardieu in 'Going Places'

(1952), had absented herself from filmmaking for most of a decade before making her first notable return to the big screen here, as a nursing mother on an otherwise empty train, whom Jean-Claude tempts into breastfeeding Pierrot in exchange for some of their stolen cash. As much as Pierrot enjoys it, the encounter doesn't provoke his desired erection, but it ironically braces the woman both sexually and financially for a memorable homecoming with her soldier husband, who's been away for five months. A pick-up from a crime scene, Marie-Ange (Miou-Miou, in real life the mother of Dewaere's first child and, sources say, Depardieu's lover at the time of filming), proves too sexually unresponsive to arouse any man, so the pair dump her and drive to a place where Jean-Claude promises they'll find a sexual hunger so intense "you would burn your finger to put it inside": a women's prison. There they see the careworn, middle-aged Jeanne (Moreau) being discharged. They feed and clothe her, then retire to a classy hotel for a ménage à trois which not only restores Pierrot's potency but seems to catalyse the two friends' maturity as men. Staged without nudity, the tryst is infinitely more heated and genuine than anything in Moreau's earlier triumph 'Jules and Jim' (1962), and ends with whiplash suddenness, as if the celluloid itself was snapped by a passion too real to be called acting.

The next morning, Moreau exits the film just as abruptly, with her (and her

It is a serious film about the compulsion to continually prove oneself sexually and creatively by breaking new barriers

character's) mystery intact, committing suicide by firing the men's stolen pistol into her own vagina, which sends them back, traumatised, to the near-comatose Marie-Ange, shedding bitter tears on her bare chest. Due to Moreau's casting, it is impossible to watch the rest of the film without seeing Jean-Claude and Pierrot as 'the new Jules and Jim', and Blier has the 'valseuses' to force the thinking further by having the trio set up house together in a rustic setting out of Henri-Pierre Roché.

The plot continues to surprise as the contents of Jeanne's suitcase acquaint our antiheroes with her son Jacques (Jacques Chailoux), himself due for release from prison. They make peace with Jeanne's spirit by helping him make the transition back to freedom, offering him food, drink, a bed and Marie-Ange's sluggish sexual favours – and, in a funny twist, both are insulted and outraged when the young dullard guides "the unfeeling aperture" to her first (very loud) orgasm and unleashes the kraken of her sexual desires. Jacques's aptitude for crime similarly out-distances their own modest efforts, forcing them back on the lam. After one more chance encounter with a family whose home they previously invaded (which has the perverse effect of liberating Isabelle Huppert's oppressed teenage daughter), the three leads talk, forcing an interpretation of the film as a salute to living spontaneously – perhaps the only time their bullying legitimately goes too far.

Dewaere (who worked several more times with Blier before shooting himself in a Paris hotel in 1982) and Depardieu are exemplary, both abominable and impossible to resist, and the female performers are, if anything, more impressive in their ability to find and project the underlying depths of characters whom the leads – and the film itself, to some extent – objectify.

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Richard Mulligan, is a preening megalomaniac and the film's greatest farcical stroke). Obviously Berger's agenda had his Everyman live out, and undermine, every single western cliché while reorienting the genre towards the Native American perspective, and Penn's film happily condenses the roving plot into skit comedy on the frontier.

The humour is classically un-PC, complete with gags about rape (the hero's butch sister longs to be abused by her Indian captors) and the Cheyenne tribe's resident swishy gay man. Generally, the fugue between Penn's overwrought comic tone and the careful attention to western reality can make for awkward schtick (Faye Dunaway's sexually deranged Christian wife turned whore is never the hoot she's meant to be) but can also be inspired, particularly when we stay with the Cheyenne and the slow-talking Chief Dan George, whose hilariously wizened dimness nabbed him an Oscar nomination. Beautifully shot in widescreen by seasoned western vet Harry Stradling Jr, the film's conspicuous ambitions and merry way with history are finally winning, if not particularly deep-dish, and end up feeling like a slice of Americana itself.

Disc: Fine transfer, no extras. (MA)

Medea

Pier Paolo Pasolini; Italy/France/West Germany 1970; BFI/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 12; 107/111 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: multiple soundtracks, trailers, booklet

Film: Seven years after *Jason and the Argonauts*, Pasolini offered a very different treatment of the same myth, filtered loosely through Euripides's play. Instead of a lively costume romp, *Medea* recreates an ancient, initially dauntingly alien world of gesture and ritual (including human sacrifice), arid landscapes and harshly dissonant North African music (nearly two decades before 'World Music' became another record-label commodity) allied to a conceptual approach that sees one climactic scene staged twice, as subjective myth and as objective reality – though a 'reality' in which centaurs appear on screen and Medea's magical powers are genuine. In her only feature-film role, Maria Callas doesn't sing and barely speaks, but her iconic presence was clearly more than sufficient for Pasolini's purposes: a legend is fleshing out a myth.

Discs: Sourced from the recent Italian restoration, the Blu-ray in particular looks magnificently dusty and ochreous, and the choice of three soundtracks (Italian original with Callas's own voice, Italian cinema, English dub) is beyond the call of duty. On-disc extras are sadly minimal compared with other BFI Pasolini releases, but the booklet is the usual hefty effort, combining new and contemporary essays, a Callas interview, a Pasolini biography and a double-page colour reproduction of one of Peter Strausfeld's most memorable Academy Cinema woodcut-style posters. (MB)

Films by Oshima Nagisa

In the Realm of the Senses

France/Japan 1976; Optimum/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 18; 98/102 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: two documentaries, panel discussion, deleted scenes

Empire of Passion

France/Japan 1978; Optimum/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 18; 101/105 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: documentary, panel discussion

Films: Anatole Dauman's Argos Films had already produced several memorable examples of arty erotica (notably in collaboration with Walerian Borowczyk), so when Oshima Nagisa proposed making an overtly pornographic film, Dauman was delighted to bankroll it and reap the considerable rewards from the resulting *succès de scandale*. Thirty-six years on, *In the Realm of the Senses* is still startlingly confrontational, the unambiguously unsimulated sex scenes staged with an acute awareness of their participants' inner psychology in a way that conventional porn doesn't just omit but actively shuns. At a time (the mid-1930s) when Japanese foreign policy was becoming aggressively externalised, the lovers Sada and Kichi try to achieve both total privacy and perfect sexual fusion, constantly under the scrutiny of numerous onscreen voyeurs and, even when ostensibly closeted away from prying eyes, the film's own audience. In a way that Bishop Berkeley would undoubtedly recognise, the private is permanently public.

Dauman was clearly expecting something similar when he funded *Empire of Passion* two years later, though despite a few surface echoes (Fuji Tatsuya as the male lead, the theme of erotic obsession), it's quite a different beast, being essentially a 19th-century Japanese ghost story in the manner of *Onibaba* or *Kwaidan*, with echoes of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and the more guilt-ridden passages of *Les Diaboliques*. Two illicit lovers plan to kill the woman's husband, a notionally perfect crime which inevitably and agonisingly unravels, leading to a scene of clammy horror at the bottom of a well that surely must have influenced *Ringu* 20 years later. It's an engrossing, expertly mounted but strangely anonymous film, especially when set against its endlessly provocative predecessor and indeed Oshima's back catalogue as a whole.

Discs: Released separately in similar dual-format packages, the transfers are excellent. The earlier film has different extras from the Criterion edition, but they cover similarly comprehensive ground, especially the 52-minute retrospective documentary directed by *S&S* contributor David Thompson. Each edition features a different, lengthy panel discussion between scholars Mathieu Capel, Roland Domenig, Julian Ross and Jasper Sharp, which sets the films against Oshima's career and Japanese film history as a



Empire of Passion An engrossing, expertly mounted but strangely anonymous film, especially when set against its provocative predecessor

whole. Incidentally, this is the first BBFC-approved video release of the uncut, uncropped version of *In the Realm of the Senses*: it's Dauman's 102-minute edition, with the scenes removed from Oshima's original 108-minute cut presented separately. (MB)

The Overcoat

Alberto Lattuada; Italy 1952; RaroVideo/Region O DVD; 107 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: interviews, documentaries, deleted scenes, booklet

Film: The rare instance of an Italian adaptation of classic Russian literature, this nearly forgotten neorealism-era comedy from veteran director Lattuada transplants Gogol's absurdist tale of bureaucratic doom to the familiarly decaying streets and cavernous municipal offices of Rome, where Carmine (Renato Rascel), a bumbling clerk and stenographer, confronts his low station under the boot-heels of power. His solution is to replace his tattered coat with a new model, thereby going deep into debt and allowing himself to prudently meddle with the layers of hierarchy until, fatefully, his coat is stolen right off his back, and his destiny is sealed.

Gogol's story is here inflated with all manner of high and low farce (the work of seven

contributing screenwriters, including Cesare Zavattini), extrapolating either on Carmine's hapless, whimpering idiocy (co-opting umbrellas and other forms of mobile shelter during a rainstorm, hunting for cash he's forgotten he's hidden) or on the density of self-involved silliness and corrupt vacuity within state government, which here takes on a distinctly Italian flavour.

Gogol's social satire is modernised sharply, to the point that nearly everything official uttered by Carmine's superiors is a Bizarro World contradiction or an outright lie. But the hyper-extended focus on the nebbishy protagonist dilutes that potential, and Rascel, who comes off like a diminutive cross between a young De Niro and George Tobias, is a bit too much of a schtick comedian to make the character live in three dimensions.

Gorgeously shot in eye-tearing black and white by Mario Montuori, the film ends up being less than cosmically comic, and stands as certainly one of post-war Italy's

Watch the birdie: 'The Overcoat'



strangest projects, proudly (as the DVD notes have it) "anti-neorealist".

Disc: To-die-for restoration and transfer, supplemented with commentary by scholar Flavio de Bernardinis, an Angelo Pasquini interview and piles of critical exegesis from Italian critics from 1952 and since. (MA)

The Red and the White

Miklós Jancsó; Hungary/USSR 1967; Magyar Nemzeti Digitális Archívum és Filmintézet/Region O DVD; 87 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 anamorphic; Features: two documentaries ('In Costroma with a Camera', 'How The Red and the White was Born'), alternative Soviet cut

Film: "Miklós Jancsó is a typical representative of auteur filmmaking. This movement is much more extreme in Hungary than in our country. Any kind of screenplay we work out together, he will deviate from when it comes to shooting. Even at this point we regret to disappoint those comrades who expect a huge celebratory film for the anniversary. This will not happen." Written to Mosfilm's executives shortly before shooting commenced, dramaturge Valeri Karen's pessimistic assessment of what was originally planned as a large-scale Hungarian-Soviet collaboration to mark the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution proved all too accurate.

While refining the style introduced in *The Round-Up* (1966), with complex choreographies of camera, men and horses providing an often exhilarating substitute for conventional dramatic development, Jancsó conspicuously failed to include the paean to the Soviet forces and their Hungarian allies that the project was specifically commissioned to deliver. Instead, no particular distinction is drawn between Bolsheviks (Reds) and Tsarists (Whites) during the 1919 civil war, hardly anyone is identified by name, there's little dialogue aside from barked orders to underlings or captives, and both sides seem equally capable of committing atrocities as a means of gaining a usually temporary upper hand. In the closing moments, when the camera retreats to the far distance to watch hundreds of tiny figures being mown down by even more minuscule opponents, Jancsó seems to be anticipating the passionless mass slaughter of hi-tech modern warfare and computer games, but with no one bothering to keep score.

Discs: Sourced from the 2011 Hungarian National Film Archive restoration, this two-disc edition eclipses the Clavis, Kino and Second Run DVD releases, offering a noticeably sharper picture. Fascinating (and English-subtitled) extras comprise a short featurette from 1967 (with Jancsó choreographing actors and camera while clad in skimpy Speedos), a lengthy retrospective documentary (going into particular detail about Hungarian-Soviet disputes and including illustrative readings from the original Mosfilm-approved script), and the 67-minute Soviet cut of the

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film, severely truncated in an ambitious but doomed attempt to turn it into the revolutionary celebration originally envisaged. This version opens with a declamatory voiceover singing out the Bolsheviks and their Hungarian allies for praise; and the female nudity and upfront massacres have been removed, often noticeably vandalising Jancsó's single-shot sequences in the process. The bizarrely incongruous formal dance in the silver birch wood has gone too, presumably because of its implied nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary past. (MB)

The Tree of Life

Terrence Malick; US 2011; 20th Century Fox/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 133 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: production featurette

Film: Not merely garlanded (the Palme d'Or, the runaway winner of *Sight & Sound's* 2011 critics' poll) but virtually canonised in some quarters, Terrence Malick's fifth feature takes root in deceptively simple, possibly autobiographical reminiscences of a childhood and adolescence in the director's own native Waco, Texas. Norman Rockwell and Stan Brakhage make unlikely bedfellows, but Malick seems equally in tune with both, encouraging Emmanuel Lubezki's camera to move with an eyeball's unfettered freedom, its darting side glances as revealing as head-on stares.

Watching it second time round, the Sean Penn subplot feels even more clunkily over-symbolic, and the relevance of the portentous 'creation' segment is likely to remain eternally contentious, if visually and aurally gobsmacking. But the 1950s material, thankfully making up the bulk of the running time, is staged with such enthrallingly tactile and atmospheric detail that it almost comes across as implanted memories. **Disc:** As close to perfection as a compressed digital format can conceivably get, the Blu-ray will undoubtedly become demonstration material in a great many households – the eight-channel soundtrack in particular is an all-enveloping marvel. Disappointingly, the only extra comprises bog-standard gushing, with Malick himself a glaring if unsurprising absentee. (The separate DVD release wasn't supplied for review, but appears to have the same content.) (MB).

Also released

Punishment Park

Peter Watkins; UK/US 1971; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 15; 88 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

This month's releases
reviewed by Sergio Angelini,
Michael Atkinson,
James Bell, Michael Brooke
and Geoffrey Macnab

TELEVISION

Children of the Stones

HTV/ITV; UK 1977; Network/Region 2 DVD; 174 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: booklet, stills gallery, sampler disc

Programme: This often unnerving seven-part serial by Jeremy Burnham and Trevor Ray offers an ambitious gallimaufry of ingredients, combining black holes, psychometry, stone circles, a 'Happy Day' cult straight out of *The Wicker Man*, time loops and race-memory flourishes reminiscent of Nigel Kneale. The result is often surprisingly tasty, however, with a restrained Iain Cuthbertson as the equivocal squire overseeing a *Midwich Cuckoos*-style exercise in social engineering. Backed by a memorable score by Sidney Sager almost entirely made up of chanting, this ranks with *Sapphire and Steel* as among the most bizarre and thought-provoking of pre-watershed fantasy dramas of the 1970s. **Discs:** Although none of the interviews from previous home-video releases has been included, this set boasts a booklet by Tim Worthington on HTV's fantasy television programming and a sampler disc of the company's output. (SA)

Community – Season 1

Krasnow-Foster/Russo Brothers/Dan Harmon/Universal/NBC; US 2009-10; Sony Home Entertainment/Region 2; Certificate 15; 597 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 anamorphic; Features: audio commentaries, outtakes, deleted scenes, mini-episodes, interviews, featurettes

Programme: This single-camera sitcom takes an unusual subject – what happens to people after they fail – and the seemingly unprepossessing location of a dismal, malfunctioning community college in Colorado to deliver a consistently agile and witty series on the disasters befalling its roster of dishevelled characters. Joel McHale leads as Jeff, an ex-lawyer trying to get his licence back, who sets up a study group as a way into the knickers of blonde bombshell (and anarchist manqué) Britta but ends up making some real friends instead. The biggest cast name is probably Chevy Chase as an unreconstructed, much divorced moist-towelette magnate, though the most eye-grabbing turns come from Danny Pudi as pop-culture sponge Abed and Ken Jeong as Señor Chang, the world's most hostile Spanish teacher ("My nickname is El Tigre").

Pop-culture references abound (a *Goodfellas* spoof about control of the canteen's supply of chicken fingers is especially inspired), though only an action-movie parody directed by Justin Lin (best known for his contributions to the *Fast & Furious* franchise) comes even close to scratching the surface of the fourth wall.

Community is stylistically quite restrained, content to deliver just the odd love tap in the direction of zanier



Children of the Stones It ranks with '*Sapphire and Steel*' as among the most bizarre and thought-provoking pre-watershed 1970s fantasy dramas

and more postmodern competitors such as *Glee* (a sobbing Jeff confesses, "I don't understand the appeal at all!"). There is even a story arc of sorts in the lead up to the season finale via the simmering sexual tension between Jeff and Britta, which is rather splendidly sabotaged in a last-minute cliffhanger. **Discs:** The anamorphic image is impeccable and the 5.1 audio well up to snuff. The phalanx of extras includes cast and crew commentaries on every episode and half an hour's funny (and occasionally tetchy) outtakes. (SA)

Shoestring – Series 1

BBC; UK 1979; 2 entertain/Region 2; 558 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Programme: Thanks to the 1979 ITV strike this BBC detective series got enormous viewing figures on its debut, but the truth is that it deserved to do well. Tasked with setting a one-hour drama in the then unexplored (at least on TV) West of England, writer-producer Robert Banks Stewart came up with a smart variation on the private-eye genre, eschewing the world-weary dyspepsia of the long-running *Public Eye* (1965-75) and the more shortlived Cockney wide-boy brass of *Hazell* (1978-79).

The show's setting in a Bristol radio station could easily have been a one-trick gimmick were it not for some intelligent and sensitive scripts and the genuine charm of new leading man Trevor Eve. Like his counterpart

in the almost contemporary US show *Harry O* (1974-76), Eddie Shoestring has a boat permanently in dry dock, reflecting his own emotionally stranded persona. Oozing vulnerability, Eve plays our hero – an ex-computer programmer recovering from a mental breakdown – with a beguiling mixture of nervous energy and naivety that can be both disarming and highly appealing while also retaining a slight edge, with hints of neurosis breaking through the surface.

If the pace is sometimes a little stately, there's a myriad of cameos to maintain interest (including blink-and-you-miss-it appearances from Lynda Bellingham and Kevin Whately) while cases run the gamut from burglary and kidnapping to bank robbery, drug smuggling and murder. The best stories, though, are those in which the brash, cocky but damaged Eddie is most personally involved, as in Philip Martin's 'Find the Lady', when he revisits the clinic where he recovered from his breakdown. Set in the world of punk music and particularly noteworthy for its clear sympathy with youth culture, this episode features Toyah Willcox as an appropriately mannered punk singer, and even manages to turn Christopher Biggins into a persuasive heavy.

Discs: No extras, but crucially all the episodes are presented uncut (apart from a small music edit), unlike recent repeats. Image quality is surprisingly strong, making this long-delayed release even more welcome. (SA)

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BOOK OF THE MONTH

'It must be a virus'

A new book of conversations reveals the great director's demons, says Philip Horne

Scorsese on Scorsese

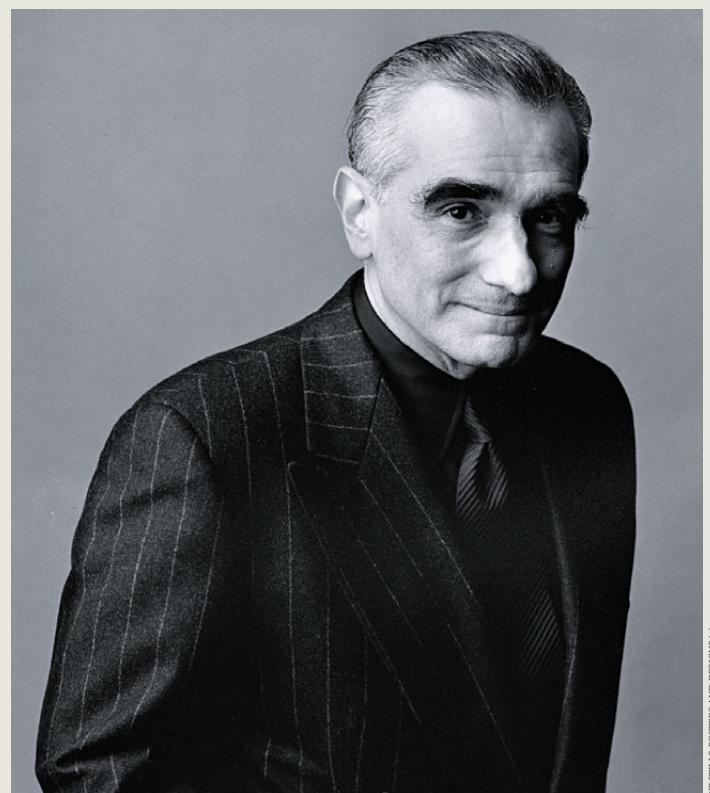
by Michael Henry Wilson,
Cahiers du cinéma, 320pp, £45,
ISBN 9782866427023

First a clarification: this is not the same book as the excellent Faber 'Scorsese on Scorsese', edited by Ian Christie and David Thompson, which went into its most recent edition in 2003, but an updated English-language version of 'Entretiens avec Martin Scorsese', based on interviews originally printed in *Positif*. When you see it – and attempt to pick it up – the difference from its Faber namesake is palpable: Wilson's beautifully produced tome is a hefty slab, requiring a strong coffee table. You could whack a mook with it very satisfactorily.

Fortunately it also serves as a superb – and for aficionados, indispensable – account of the packed life and bewildering, awe-inspiring career of a director who, though now reaching the end of his seventh decade, remains as active and in some ways as innovative as ever (witness the recent 'Hugo' in 3D), as well as a tireless champion of the history of US and world cinema on a number of fronts. Wilson has not only had enviable access in these "ritual interviews" across the years, but has become a friend and collaborator, who co-wrote and co-directed the magnificent 'A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies' (1995).

There's an informal intimacy and digressiveness here, catching particular moments in Scorsese's career, that the Christie-Thompson book – for all its own great virtues – mostly doesn't attempt. A great talker and storyteller – intelligent, self-questioning, tortured, passionate, funny – Scorsese is excellent, stimulating company. And the book is lavishly illustrated with photos, script pages, sketches and other documents from Scorsese's personal archive.

Wilson's tenacity helps certain consistent themes to emerge – Catholicism, guilt, cinephilia (there are innumerable watching tips here), spirituality, the bleakness of America and the world. We're reminded of Scorsese's radical discontent, a disillusion arising partly from early experience of the Mafia, as he said in 1974: "I've seen corruption up close. I've seen it operating every day. After that you can't take the Establishment seriously. It's all a fraud."



Martin Scorsese: "never afraid of what might seem awkward or unusual"

The great early works – 'Mean Streets', 'Taxi Driver', 'Raging Bull' – were especially driven by a sacred rage against the way things are, and some measure of identification with his antiheroes. "There's a Travis [Bickle] in all of us, I'm convinced of that," he said; and later, "One shouldn't behave like Jake [LaMotta], of course, but isn't there something rotten in the world in which we live?" For this driven, visionary director, filmmaking is more an addiction than a cure ("It must be a virus," he says); and elsewhere, "I can't seem to find pleasure in it"). Scorsese nearly died as a result of overwork in 1978; shooting 'Shutter Island' plunged him into "an extraordinary kind of depression that lasted about three months". In 2000, on the set of 'Gangs of New York', he laughs in agreement when someone quotes Alain Resnais: "Directing films is nice, but going to the movies is so much better."

Though Scorsese complains that "the shoot is the phase I enjoy least", there are many euphoric moments recorded here, and he is eloquent about planning (especially camera movements) and editing. "It's when you're editing that you have to find the film's emotional rhythm," he said in 1993. "That's when the material comes to life and becomes a film." There are two fascinating interviews here with Scorsese's editor Thelma Schoonmaker,

'Shutter Island' plunged him into a depression that lasted three months

in which their complex working method is described in detail. She traces Scorsese's distinctiveness to their early joint training in documentary: "Marty always strives to hunt out the truth in human relationships and is never afraid of what might seem awkward or unusual". He grabs hold of the things that most directors would reject; he builds on them and puts them to good use." This reminds us of how, in the best Scorsese scenes, one is often startled by recognising some gesture, intonation or tic that people really display in life, just not in other people's movies – a core of truthfulness that's often very moving.

There have been many obstacles and frustrations over the years since the success of 'Taxi Driver', "a film that was personal, yet produced inside the system". (Scorsese originally wanted to make Truffaut-like "personal subjects, very fast", and dislikes the new world "dominated by giant corporations with their theme parks and mass-market films".) The record of projects Scorsese didn't complete, or hasn't yet – from 'The Honeymoon Killers' in 1969 to 'Gershwin' and 'Dino' and a sequel to 'Mean Streets' – is mind-boggling. The probably inevitable compromise policy of 'one for them, one for myself' has had obvious drawbacks, and yet Scorsese's steely, decades-long determination to make the films he wants to make (eg 'The Last Temptation of Christ' and 'Gangs of New York') is unabated, so both 'Silence' (from Endo's novel about the Jesuits in Japan) and his long-awaited documentary on British cinema seem realistic prospects. Wilson's labour of love is worthy of its subject's.

FURTHER READING

The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit

Edited by Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 352pp, £22.50, ISBN 9781844573745

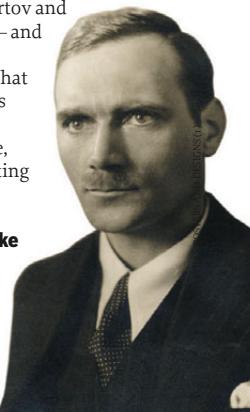
Before picking up this hefty book, it was tempting to assume that the GPO Film Unit's comparatively brief history had already been mined to exhaustion. The BFI's DVD editions come with ample documentation, and most interested parties will probably own at least one of those. Cannily, the editors of this book acknowledge from the start that they're entering a crowded field, and characterise their offering as "a one-stop resource". Certainly, it's hard to think of a better single-volume survey. It comprises 23 new essays from many of the field's acknowledged experts, facsimiles of contemporary documentation (correspondence, script excerpts, production schedules, magazine articles, colour promotional materials, fascinating if occasionally toe-curling excerpts from *The Post Office Magazine*, first-person accounts by big names like Lotte Reiniger) and a complete annotated filmography – although sadly not a one-place bibliography, despite comprehensive referencing of individual chapters.

In addition to the expected histories of the unit (including Forsyth Hardy's 1990 survey, written with the authority of someone who was there) and studies of individual films and filmmakers (Dai Vaughan's chapter on editor Stewart McAllister is a useful rebuke to dogmatic auteurists), it covers such subjects as the GPO's cutting-edge design, its presentation of technology in an era of rapid change (and the constantly evolving technology underpinning the films themselves), the films' 'Britishness', their use of music and relationship to art history, their international impact and their response to and presentation of the turbulent history of the 1930s and early 1940s.

Individual essays are delightfully idiosyncratic: Martin Stollery's analysis of the films' voiceover commentaries incorporates both statistical analysis and wider sociological issues (unit head John Grierson's stated intention to favour working-class and regional accents was undermined by his own preference for hiring Oxbridge graduates), while Paul Rennie traces the links facilitated by the unit's output between Dziga Vertov and Peter Greenaway – and even children's television. Given that the GPO's business model involved connecting people, such wide net-casting seems singularly appropriate.

Michael Brooke

GPO man:
John Grierson



Knockout: The Boxer and Boxing in American Cinema

By Leger Grindon, University Press of Mississippi, 320pp, £34, ISBN 9781604739886

"One sure thing was that it wouldn't be a film about boxing!" Leger Grindon quotes Martin Scorsese on the approach he and Robert De Niro took to the Jake LaMotta biopic *Raging Bull* (1980). "We didn't know a thing about it and it didn't interest us at all."

Despite their disclaimer, Grindon rigorously isolates the boxing movie, never considering it as a sub-genre of sports movie or addressing the way it overlaps with other forms – aside from an inevitable association of a specific cycle of boxing movie with the gangster genre of the 1930s (*Kid Galahad*) and the *film noir* of the 1940s (*Body and Soul*). There are boxing comedies, from Buster Keaton's *Battling Butler* to *Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man* – via Bugs Bunny's ring antics – but Grindon doesn't give them a look-in.

It's evident from the occasional aside – like noting that Robert Ryan (star of 1949's *The Set-Up*) had an amateur boxing career before becoming an actor – that Grindon knows a great deal about boxing, though it's hard to discern from the text whether he's a fight fan or would lobby for the cruel spectacle to be outlawed. Along with the usual academic fussiness (the book as a whole and every chapter in it adheres to the convention of saying what is about to be said, saying it at some length and then saying what has just been said), this reticence makes for a somewhat dry, if not unrewarding read.



Out for the count: Jeff Bridges in John Huston's 'Fat City'

Presumably, to embark on a project like this, the author must have been interested in and enthusiastic about the subject; the text conveys the former, if not necessarily the latter.

This book is about boxing movies: even documentaries like *When We Were Kings* (1996) and *On the Ropes* (1999) are assessed as expressions of mythologies about the fight game that inform based-on-fact films like *Somebody up There Likes Me* (1956) and fictions like *Fat City* (1972). It's narrow-focused to American cinema, too – so no musings about the kinship between Hollywood boxing movies and, say, the masked-wrestler pictures of Mexico or the many

variant martial-arts cinemas of Asia. Nevertheless, there is quite enough to deal with from America alone: Grindon looks at early cinema, when films of real prizefights served as a substitute in states where boxing was illegal, before fictional fights came to the fore after steps were taken to limit actuality boxing movies. Subsequently the genre has come and gone, with clusters of films – as mapped in charts in the appendices – popping up every decade.

"The boxer stands alongside the cowboy, the gangster, and the detective as a figure that has shaped America's idea of manhood," Grindon begins. His book considers the changing face (and

ethnicity) of American manhood as embodied by such characters as the Champ (pertinently, he notes the contrast between the affectionate criticism of Wallace Beery's big kid in the 1931 original and the indulgent valorisation of Jon Voight in the 1979 remake), ruthless Kirk Douglas in *Champion* (1949), ex-boxers like Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront* (1954), Rocky Balboa, LaMotta in *Raging Bull* (which earns a whole chapter that could almost be a BFI Film Classic in its own right) and the heroines of *Girfight* (2000) and *Million Dollar Baby* (2004). An odd note about this minor genre is how often boxing movies – and performances as boxers – have earned Oscars, suggesting that Hollywood voters at least respond to boxers rather more than they do to cowboys, gangsters and detectives.

Though a 2011 publication, this leaves off after considering three stray 21st-century films – *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (2004), *Million Dollar Baby* and *Cinderella Man* (2005) – rather than the far more appropriate sign-off of *The Fighter*. The boxing movie often touches on America's sore spots, and not just in the perception – fostered by so many 'take a dive in the fifth' scenes – that the fight game is rigged. In fiction and documentary, Irish, Jewish, Hispanic and African-American fighters may win bouts or titles, but the physical and spiritual punishment sustained in the course of a career almost always makes them losers in the long run.

♦ Kim Newman

The Films of Elías Querejeta: A Producer of Landscapes

By Tom Whittaker University of Wales Press, 240pp, £35, ISBN 9780708324387

There are few producers who have had as wide an influence on the processes and practices of Spanish filmmaking as the Basque-born Elías Querejeta. Primarily recognised as the man behind Carlos Saura's films from the mid-1960s until 1980, he was effectively the pulse behind much of the *Nuevo Cine Español* (New Spanish Cinema) that offered innovative modes of evading the restrictions imposed by the Franco regime. Tom Whittaker's meticulous study of Querejeta offers both a study of his pervasive presence in Spanish filmmaking and an analysis of key films with which he has been associated.

Whittaker constructs a portrait of Querejeta as an auteur producer whose work goes beyond fundraising, management and distribution. This is a producer who dabbles in treatments, who allegedly cut ten minutes from Wim Wenders's *The Scarlet Letter* (1972) without the director's permission, and who spectacularly fell out with Víctor Erice over *El sur* (1983) after pulling out four weeks before the end of shooting. After the premiere of Erice's earlier film *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973), Luis

Cuadrado – the cinematographer responsible for its honey-yellow hues – is known to have pinned Querejeta to a wall and shouted "brujo" (witch) at him.

Whittaker doesn't iron over the tensions involved in Querejeta's hands-on approach, but he also recognises how this method served to nurture consecutive generations of Spanish filmmakers. The producer effectively put together a remarkable team of artists – painterly cinematographers Cuadrado and Teo Escamilla (later replaced in the 1980s by José Luis Alcaine and Alfredo Mayo), editor Pablo González del Amo, avant-garde composer Luis de Pablo – who helped create the distinctive Querejeta house style.

Whittaker's book expertly charts a path through the producer's output: the formal experimentation of the early 1960s; the state-of-the-nation pieces employing direct sound and a stark metaphorical realism to dissect the political and social mores of Francoist Spain; the hermetic 'other' rural films of the 1973-84 years; the portrait of the Basque landscape offered in films such as Montxo Armendáriz's *Tasio* (1984); the shift to the urban represented by Saura's *Hurry! Hurry!* (1981); and the global/local concerns of the producer's



Social setting: 'Mondays in the Sun'

work in the noughties with such films as *Mondays in the Sun* (2002) and *Winter in Baghdad* (2004).

There is no attempt to provide commentaries on all Querejeta's films. Instead, by opting for a selective focus on certain key works, Whittaker is able to map how the producer has consistently supported work engaging with the material conditions and ideological underpinnings of the Spanish nation. From his early short *By Way of San Sebastián* (1962) – which interrogated the static, picture-postcard images of the Basque coastal city used to foster tourism in the years of accelerated *desarrollo* (modernisation) – to the erosion of communal identities shown in *Mondays in the Sun*, Querejeta has displayed a marked preference for

supporting work that is socially engaged and politically defiant. He has proved belligerent – refusing to cut a contentious scene from Saura's *Cousin Ángelica* (1974) – and opportunistic: he was able to 'protect' his films in Spain by providing quality arthouse fare for the international festival circuit in the final decade of Franco's rule.

The focus on landscape – what the author terms "a spatialization of modernization" – offers a trajectory mapping the country's evolution from a largely rural nation to a global terrain where accelerated development is evident in the boom-and-bust economy and the unregulated construction that has so marked Spain's extensive coastline. Indeed, Whittaker demonstrates how this "producer of landscapes" has offered a film journey through Spain's cultural geography. I'm not convinced that the theoretical framework (from Deleuze to Levinas) is as effectively integrated into the central argument as it might have been, but this is nevertheless a perceptive and elegantly written study of Querejeta, with translations of all quotes into English and a useful filmography that testifies to the scope of his work.

♦ Maria M. Delgado



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Ambiguous Amy

Graham Fuller's review of Rod Lurie's remake of *Straw Dogs* (*S&S*, December 2011) describes the rape scene in Sam Peckinpah's original as 'gratuitous and failing to advance the storyline. But the scene is pivotal both to the film and Peckinpah's admittedly limited worldview. It is disturbing precisely because it is ambiguous about the extent to which Amy consents. Within the film's fabulistic logic, the degree of Amy's consent marks the extent to which she is willing to surrender to primitive urges and reject the confines of progressive domestic bliss. It reflects a male fear that female desire might secretly yearn for not just the external but also the untamed.

If Amy is seen merely as a "sacrificial pawn" who is "asking for it", the relevance of the scene is lost – and most of the film is rendered not only gratuitous but also meaningless.

Tony Keily
By email

Celluloid betrayal

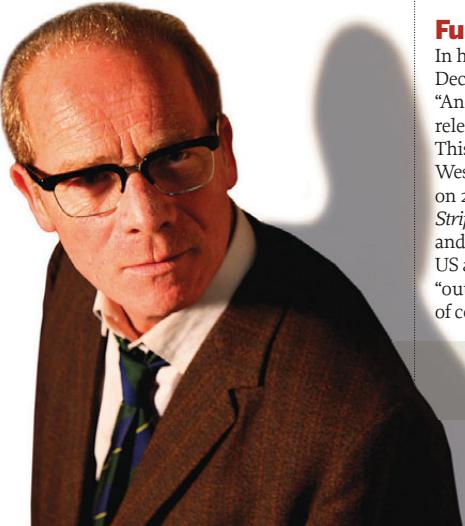
While I certainly agree with Jason Wood (*Letters*, *S&S*, November 2011) that digital projection offers yet another "texture" – another option for both artists and audiences alike – the key problem remains the indiscriminate supplanting of celluloid by digital projection. As an artistic medium so dominated by the idea of authorship, surely films should be seen in the manner envisaged by their creators? For all those shot on celluloid, the transition to digital transforms the content of the film itself. It is sad to see the financial gain of digital for exhibitors overshadowing the artistic integrity of works. Here in Australia, at least, even many so-called 'arthouse' theatres are turning to digital for financial reasons, making it all but impossible to see many films as their makers intended.

Cameron McCormick
By email

Need to talk about 'Neds'

I must admit it really gets my goat (sorry, *Le quattro volte*) to see the way that Peter

Peter Mullan in 'Neds'



LETTER OF THE MONTH

How to cut a fine figure

Re Nick Roddick's article on distribution (*Mr Busy*, *S&S*, January), the real figure a producer will get if you go down the conventional distribution route is less than 12 per cent. The cinemas only pay the sales agent between 25–35 per cent [of the box-office take], and if you're lucky the distributor gets half of that and then the producer half again: ie 7.5 per cent max. But the real killer is that you only get that after both the sales agent and distributor have recouped their 'costs'. Depending on the scrupulousness of both parties, these can be massively inflated, meaning that you could quite easily take £100K at the box office and get back absolutely nothing!

There are, of course, many honest and hard-working sales agents and distributors out there. But it did make us decide to handle the cinematic release of our last film *Way of the Morris* (right) ourselves.

What we did was keep all the UK rights and contact the cinema chains direct. That way we got the 35 per cent box-office returns in their entirety, but it's a double-edged sword, as you have to shell out all the money for prints, posters, photos, press releases, screenings, adverts etc yourself. It also means you need to do all the work of calling the cinemas booking the tour. But it does mean you can keep all these costs down to what they actually cost and start getting profits straight away.

We got 36 screens for *Way of the Morris* (which is unheard of for a film that cost about £25K) and more or less



broke even. Not even the studios expect to make their money back on domestic theatrical release alone, but what it does do is give you a profile to make the TV/DVD/foreign sales. And for the latter, at least, a sales agent is invaluable. To try to do what we did in the UK in every country on Earth would be impossible!

Most importantly, in my opinion, we had a film that you could take direct to the cinema chains and actually convince them they could sell. You wouldn't think it, but a documentary about Morris dancing is infinitely easier to sell than a glossy drama with semi-famous TV actors, as the cinemas can see a guaranteed group of people that will come and buy tickets, no matter what.

I should mention that this mode of

distribution is only possible because of the digital screens being put in all over the country. To try to open on 35 screens with 35mm prints at about £1,000 a print would have been impossible on our scale. But now you can get your film put on a hard drive for a few hundred quid and simply circulate it to all the cinemas to download ahead of time.

In my opinion, the UK Film Council missed a huge trick when they didn't impose a French-style quota of UK films in exchange for giving the cinemas free digital projectors. But despite this, the existence of these projectors does make the democratisation of film distribution a possibility.

Rob Curry
Director, *Fifth Column Films*
By email

Mullan's film *Neds* has been ignored this year. It does not appear in a single *S&S* critic's 'best of' list for 2011 (*S&S*, January), and also received a minimal film-distribution deal. Salt is merely rubbed into the wounds to see how the (massively) overrated *We Need to Talk About Kevin* has apparently succeeded in beguiling all and sundry.

Neds featured a superb cast of near-unknown British acting talent and demonstrated a rare quality of poetic realism (à la Lynne Ramsay/Andrea Arnold at their best), which should be treasured and not ignored!

Keith Messenger
By email

Full release

In his DVD review of *Strip-Tease*, (*S&S*, December 2011) Tim Lucas writes: "And here, finally, is the film itself, never released theatrically outside France..." This is incorrect: it was released in West Germany as *Das Mädchen Ariane* on 25 December 1963, in Denmark as *Stripteasedanserinden Ariane* in 1964, and in Sweden in 1965. The UK and the US are not the only places in the world "outside France"! Anyway, this DVD is, of course, an essential purchase.

Thank you for an always stimulating and rewarding DVD review section.

Lars Ølgård
Copenhagen, Denmark

Do look again

You once again call Venice the oldest film festival in the world (*S&S*, November 2011). The title should go to Unica, an international short-film festival established by Unesco to improve relations through cultural ties. It was held for the first time in Brussels in 1931, beating Venice by one year. Two years later Louis Lumière himself chaired the competition, and nowadays around 30 countries participate over seven days.

Everyone moans about the prejudice faced by non-American films, but there is one word that makes it even harder for a film to reach an audience: non-professional. Yes, Unica is full of films not made for profit but for nobler reasons, or just for the sheer fun of it. But isn't that what it should be all about?

Romy van Krieken
Utrecht, The Netherlands

The real Thing

Michael Atkinson's detailed and succinct review of *The Thing* (*S&S*, January) nailed

perfectly the problems of such an undertaking. A particular bugbear with the current reboot is that it lacks the true dread of John Carpenter's visceral 1982 take on the story (enhanced immeasurably by Ennio Morricone's haunting score). It also fails to capitalise on the sense of isolation that is so prevalent in Antarctica.

The biggest let-down is, as Atkinson rightly states, the stodgy CGI creature, paling beside Rob Bottin's superb original creation, which used flawless mechanical effects. However, as stated in the review, its main saving grace is Mary Elizabeth Winstead, who manages to convey stoic heroism without resorting to hysterics or macho bombast. But I came out of the movie aching to view the Carpenter version once again.

Peter Moore
By email

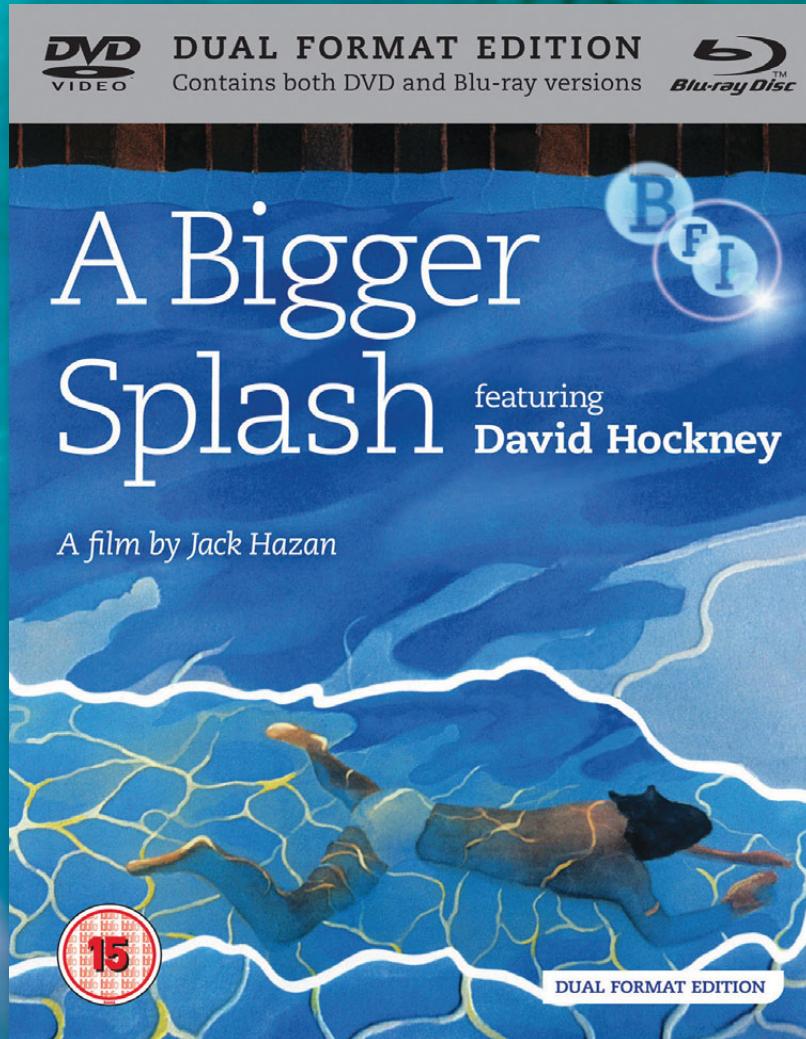
Additions & corrections

January 2012 p. 64 *Dreams of a Life*, 12A, 94m 33s, 8,509 ft +8 frames; p.66 *How to Stop Being a Loser*, 15, 109m 10s, 9,825 ft +0 frames; p.73 *Revenge A Love Story*, 18 [certified for video release], 90m 50s; p.75 *Surviving Life*, 15, 108m 57s, 9,805 ft +6 frames; p.80 *We Have a Pope*, PG, 104m 56s, 9,444 ft +0 frames; p.82 *Wreckers*, 15, 84m 38s, 7,617 ft +0 frames

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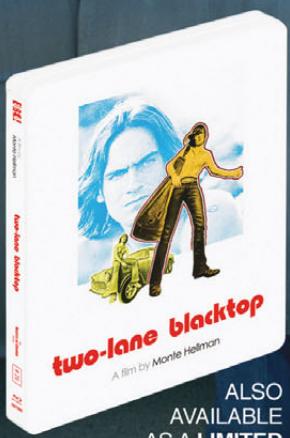
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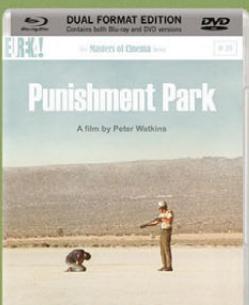


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